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Chapter 198

The first day of the finals was turbulent. It could be considered a competition to judge Jun Hyuk rather than one to decide on the winners of the piano and violin parts.

Even the judges were talking about how Jun Hyuk would conduct the choral concerto instead of the piano and violin finals.

“Did you hear what the orchestra members have been whispering about?”

“Yes. They said that there’s going to be a clear difference between the 2 conductors’ performances.”

“Not that, but about Jun.”

“Excuse me? Jun’s conducting?”

“They’re saying that his conducting in the morning and in the afternoon are completely different. They said it’ll feel as though 2 separate people are conducting if we listen to just the music...”

“Goodness. The morning and afternoon are different? Is that possible?”

“The orchestra says that it is just the tempo changing... but it fits with the violin and piano soloists exquisitely.”

“The performers aren’t following the conductor’s interpretation, but the conductor is matching himself to the performers? Why do you think the composer made such a decision?”

“My personal thinking is that it’s because this is a competition.”

“Oh, I see. Since the performers are the main part for the stage.”

The head of the chair and chair members drank coffee before the final performance started, expressing their anticipations for the performance.

The chairperson had been listening to the conversation silently before speaking up cautiously,

“We are not critics. We are judges. Our ears need to be geared toward the violin and piano. I hope you will keep this in mind.”

The chair members cleared their throats at her scolding as their faces turned red. It is evidence of how much their attention had gone to the choral concerto itself.

“I expect that you know there is difficulty in judging. The conductors’ influence is different, and the interpretations and personalities of the performances are completely different. We need to judge the skills and workmanship of the soloists among that. There is a lot of talk, but I hope that there will be a fair evaluation.”

The judges settled themselves, emptied their coffee cups, and headed to the concert hall.

There are a lot of familiar faces in the royal seats. While sitting in the audience, they shook hands and chatted, laughing. It seems they all knew each other well.

A few reporters even approached them to ask if they can take pictures. They are maestros who have flown here from different parts of Europe, and there are producers from critical and classical expert labels.

The producers in particular, have appeared to listen to today’s performance before deciding on releasing a record. He is a fearless rookie who becomes a hot topic every time he releases a new song. If Choral Concerto is not a song that is impossible to enjoy like *Inferno*, they are certain that it could surpass 1 million albums in sales.

Hadn’t *Inferno* sold almost 1 million on curiosity alone? The song to go on stage today is a piece that will have the sober assessment of whether or not it is worthy of competing with Beethoven.

As long as there are no horrible harsh criticisms, it is sure to be a piece that becomes news. It is inevitable that the label that makes this evaluation and releases the album the fastest, will bring it tremendous profits.

All of the producers looked anxious with a heavy responsibility.

As soon as the orchestra members and chorus entered, the stage became full. The

nearly 300 people looked down at the audience and that intimidation was not ordinary.

A moderator came out, fitting the scene of a competition, and started with an introduction on the finals.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the finals for the piano and violin portions of the Queen Elisabeth Competition will be starting momentarily.”

There was formal clapping from the audience, and the moderator introduced each of the 12 judges.

“The orchestra performing with the participants will be our pride, the National Orchestra of Belgium, and the chorus is the Brussels Royal Choir.”

When the 270 performers on stage greeted the audience, an applause that could not be compared with that of what happened just now exploded. The Belgian people were showing them how much they love their orchestra.

When the audience quieted down, the moderator held the mic up again.

“The first performer is No. 24 pianist Michael Looper, of Australia. The piano is Steinway. And No. 16 violinist Hayakawa Touko, of Japan. The title of the song is Concerto for Violin and Piano in D Minor, ‘Choral’. Conductor is Jun Hyuk Jang. As a special appearance is the soloist finalist of the vocal portion.....”

When the moderator’s long introduction ended, Jun Hyuk, 2 soloists, and 6 vocalists entered the stage.

They could hear very low heckling, but most of the audience were polite with enthusiastic cheers.

The main characters of the performance approached the audience, bended their backs to greet them, and the 2 soloists shook hands with the bandmaster before going back to their respective positions.

Jun Hyuk got on the podium wearing the black suit and white bow tie that Tara had carefully picked out.

When the 1st part started, the 2 soloists watched the orchestra with anxiety. Jun Hyuk

was conducting and as soon as he glared at the 2 of them, they quickly came to their senses.

“You should think of yourselves as part of the audience for the 1st part, and leave your body to the flow of the music. If you only brood over the 2nd part, it won’t be natural and you’ll trip up.”

It is what Jun Hyuk stressed during rehearsals. The 2 people shook their heads lightly to shake off their tension, and started to tune their ears to the orchestra’s music.

The maestros in the audience also geared their ears to the music. They got lost in the performance while comparing their own interpretations of the music when they first received the score to that of the composer’s.

Once the storm-like 1st part was over, the flow changed with the start of the 2nd part where the piano and violin came in.

The gentle yet fast piano calmed the relentless orchestra. But the violin was flexible and powerful as though trying to go out alone, following closely behind the piano. While the two instruments showed a sprint by going ahead of each other, the orchestra ran forward without hesitation again.

The music that was so fast that it was impossible to distinguish between the end of the 2nd part and the start of the 3rd, started to change slowly. The piano and violin maintained the exquisite balance that they had showed up until the 2nd part, and began to encroach upon the orchestra.

Now, it is not a sprint of the 2 instruments, but became like a sprint between the 2 soloists and the orchestra. They could not erase the feeling that the soloists were a bit ahead either.

The maestros watching this began to fret. Could it be that the ensemble collapses? But the back of Jun Hyuk, holding the baton, did not look exhausted at all, and the performers did not show any signs of discomposure. Once they realized that this is all the conductor’s intention, everyone sighed in relief.

When the 4th part that everyone had been waiting for started, there was not even the sound of a cough from the audience. The theater was especially full of anticipation for how the vocal duet and trio of a 150 member choir and orchestra performing Ode to Joy would compare with Beethoven’s.

However, the audience was most surprised that the familiar Ode to Joy sounded so different. The first reason is the difference in the sounds between German and English. Unlike the sternness offered by the hard and broken syllables, the flowing and almost rhythmical English made it feel as though they are listening to an aria.

Also instead of the Ode to Joy melody that they are familiar with, it is a solemn melody that shows it has influence from hymns. A tragic beauty flowed out with an emphasis on the simplicity of the chorus configuration and sporadic chords.

When the performance was complete up to the 4th part, there was only a light clapping full of disappointment rather than an explosive applause. Of an audience of over 2,000 people, only 1 out of every 10 people – about 200 people – gave a standing ovation and yelled bravo.

“That person must be from Italy, right?”

“I didn’t even imagine this kind of result... How much is that young maestro going to surprise us? Ha ha, geez.”

“I’ll say. I was expecting Beethoven, but it’s Giuseppe Verdi out of nowhere.”

The maestros in the royal seats forgot about applauding and faced each other, discussing their thoughts. Among them, just one maestro stood from his seat and applauded with tears flowing down his face.

“The answer comes from watching him. Isn’t he from Italy?”

The person who could not stop his tears is a maestro from Italy.

“The 4th part felt like we were watching Verdi, so that reaction is inevitable.”

Another maestro spoke with a big smile.

“I’m really anticipating the afternoon performance.”

The maestros looked to the person they were discussing.

“Pierre Boulez said something funny. He hinted that the the morning and afternoon performances are going to be totally different.”

He did not stop smiling as he looked at the people who could not easily understand that the 2 performances are going to be different.



“Let’s all get rid of our preconceived notions. It is the finals for the piano and violin. Only think about the soloists’ performances.”

The committee head looked at the 11 members and spoke hastily. She is speaking not only to the committee, but also to herself.

Everyone who watched the performance will be thinking the same thing. They had been expecting Beethoven, but they had fallen into chaos with a completely different music.

They need to evaluate on the music alone. They must not think that the music was bad just because it was not what they had predicted. Strictly speaking, there is no target of comparison. Isn’t it a premiere – something that has never been performed? The moment they compare it with Beethoven’s choral symphony is when it becomes too late to make a fair assessment.

“Of course. Didn’t Jun, the composer, keep saying it? He said that it is different from Beethoven’s choral symphony.”

“My head knows it, but my heart and ears kept comparing the 2 works.”

The judges shook their heads as though trying to shake the words Beethoven and choral symphony.

Just as confused as the judges are, the BOZAR theater lobby was noisy with the audience members exchanging opinions. It was not just the theater lobby that was noisy, but also the restaurants and cafes nearby.

The people who accepted only the music praised it as a great work, and the people who could not erase Beethoven from their minds, disparaged it saying that Jun Hyuk did not match up to the confidence he exhibited.

Three hours later, before the afternoon performance, the people gathered to the theater again.

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The people who knew that the conducting would be different did not lose interest, but most of the general audience were just going to enjoy the competition. They were full of anticipation for how the new pianist and violinist would perform, and watched the 2 soloists.

When Danny and Han Ye Ji greeted the audience and went back to their seats, Jun Hyuk picked up the baton. At that moment, the air in the theater changed.

A different atmosphere than that from the morning came from the performers. Their faces showed resolution as though they are players who have appeared for the World Cup finals.

The first verse started with a signal from Jun Hyuk's baton, and the expressions of the maestros in the royal seats changed.

It is fast!

The violin and violas move so vigorously that they cannot see the movement of their bows. Even the general audience could tell that there is an incomparable difference in speed to that of the morning performance.

If the morning performance's 1st part had been a storm, it now went through the score faster than a tornado. The judges' hearts beat as they listened to the music. It is so fast that they could not understand how the 2 soloists would follow along.

Notes that fill up the piano and violin completely. Performing those notes properly is not a matter of skill. It is a matter of the basic workmanship to be able to get on this movement that is faster than a tornado within moments.

Extensive practice would be necessary even for professional soloists who are already famous, but the soloists who entered the finals only had 10 days.

It is excessive to ask them to handle such a speed perfectly in such a short period of time.

When the 2nd part began however, they realized that their worries were groundless. Danny and Han Ye Ji joined the tornado perfectly, as though they had been performing together since the 1st part.

When the 2 instruments' melodies flowed out with speed, the judges could not help but express their admiration. It is admiration for the 2 performers who adapted so well, but it is also because they realized that the morning conducting had been matched to the soloists.

The judges realized that the young conductor with a strong charisma on the podium now, can be called a maestro without exaggeration.

The audience was dizzy from the incredible change between the thematic progression of the 2nd and 3rd parts, and their hearts trembled at the timpani's magnificent sound. They subconsciously put strength in their hands and clutched onto their chairs as though trying not to fall off.

The piano and violin are very different from their counterparts in the morning performance. The 2 people seemed to have forgotten that it is a stage to determine a winner. The morning performance showed the orchestra and 2 instruments going back and forth, but the soloists and orchestra on stage now have become one to go at the audience.

They had completely hidden themselves and left their workmanship, talent, and efforts to the orchestra.

The 4th part began without time to relish in how the 3rd part went by, and the soprano's scream-like timbre sounded like a trumpet call from a battlefield.

Laura Goldberg's strong technique and scale in particular showed that a large volume does not work as an excuse against 'the orchestra's volume is too big'. She proved here that one great singer can overwhelm the sound made by over 100 instruments.

The maestros could understand that it is a completely different performance. If the morning conducting had been like an Italian opera full of tragic beauty, it is now a struggle to win.

Jun Hyuk conducting the orchestra, piano, violin, vocal soloist, and chorus while controlling them to maintain tremendous change and speed, looked like the commander of a battlefield.

The maestros and critics watching this might still be in question and argument over whether he is the next Beethoven, but they cannot deny that another great has been born.

When Jun Hyuk put the baton down and turned to the audience, the audience was still silent.

They finally realized that the performance was over once they saw Danny run to Jun Hyuk and Han Ye Ji to embrace them with joy.

The audience's roar filled the theater as though they were in a cave, and every single person gave them a standing ovation.

The vocalists and main performers left the stage after bowing to the audience, but the applause did not stop. Reporters tried to keep track of the number of curtain calls there were, but gave up after the 10th.

The audience finally left the theater after seeing the chorus and orchestra leave the stage empty.

Impatient critics chatted in the theater lobby, and there were reporters everywhere trying to record this with their microphones.

"The morning performance started out as Beethoven's Fate symphony, went through a power symphony, and then culminated as Verdi's opera... Um. It was a conducting that showed a bit of a confusing configuration."

Critics chatted until they were red in the face.

"The performance he completed just now on the other hand... It doesn't need many words, does it? Maestro Jun acted on what he said with his music. Oh, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that the performance was like Beethoven. What he showed us is innovative and an aggressive conducting, and can be compared to Beethoven."

There were critics who responded to reporters' questions in calm voices, too.

"The hero of the 2nd performance? The violin that was able to express the fine and delicate emotions? The pianist who was lacking a bit in musical skill, but able to create an outstanding ensemble with the orchestra? The soprano who easily brought out a forte in difficult circumstances with brass instruments hitting?"

The critic said the next words after looking around at the reporters waiting for his next statement.

“The conductor who controlled all of this is not the hero of this performance either. The hero is the work itself. A great piece that is able to contain all of these outstanding elements. The choral concerto is the hero.”

The critic who laid out a series of high praises, finished the interview with the last question.

“I don’t think I’ll be able to wait until Maestro Pierre Boulez’s performance tomorrow. How will he express this amazing piece...? I don’t think I’ll be able to fall asleep out of curiosity.”

Yoon Kwang Hun smiled as he listened to all of the praising about Jun Hyuk. Jun Hyuk had brought all of the people who were out to crush him, onto his side. Thinking about Jun Hyuk, who proved himself with just 2 performances, he felt proud.

Yoon Kwang Hun left the theater with his ‘friends’.



“Sister, what do you think of Jun Hyuk?”

Yoon Kwang Hun was sitting in a cafe with a cup of coffee in front of him, smiling gently. He was happiest that the 4 people from Korea had witnessed the audience of over 2,000 people cheering enthusiastically for Jun Hyuk.

“It’s not what we were thinking. He still seemed like a child from what we saw on TV, but he has become an adult.”

The sister who had been streaming tears throughout the performance was drinking a milk tea as she calmed her excitement down.

“Jun Hyuk with the baton was... really impressive.”

The young sister who had fed Jun Hyuk by a bottle had become middle-aged.

“Mr. Yoon. I don’t know classical music, but did Jun Hyuk do well today?”

The middle-aged couple looked older under the sunlight and did not know music, but were still thinking about the audience's cheering.

"You may not know classical music, but you've listened to Mozart or Beethoven, right?"

"Yes."

"Jun Hyuk's name will be among people like that soon. It means that he is the most superior person in the world of classical."

"Goodness... Jun Hyuk is....."

The couple could not close their mouths at Yoon Kwang Hun's words. Even when Jun Hyuk came out on TV, they had only hoped for him to succeed as a singer in Korea. They had thought that they would be able to wash themselves of the guilt as Jun Hyuk became more successful and rooted for him enthusiastically, but he did not become a singer.

When they saw on TV that he would be going to study abroad in America, they were just grateful. But now, after just a few years, he has become a world-renowned musician. Tears formed in their eyes again.

"Mr. Yoon. Then what is going to happen to Jun Hyuk now?"

The middle-aged sister who wiped the tears from the white-haired director sister's face had trembling hands, deeply moved as well.

"Once the competition is over, he will probably perform with the New York Philharmonic. Jun Hyuk's management agency is one of the top companies in the world. Even after the New York performance, he will get to continue conducting the top orchestras all over the world."

The 4 people could understand Jun Hyuk's current situation when told that he would be conducting all over the world, rather than with a long explanation.

"I don't know if I can express how thankful I am, Mr. Yoon. I really am grateful."

The director sister bowed her head to Yoon Kwang Hun multiple times.

"Oh no, it's nothing. Jun Hyuk got all the way here on his own. I didn't do anything."

Yoon Kwang Hun waved his hand and sat her down.

When Jun Hyuk came out on TV on the audition program, 2 sisters had quietly come to the cafe. They were the 2 sisters who had raised Jun Hyuk at the orphanage.

Yoon Kwang Hun tried to have them meet with Jun Hyuk, but they politely refused and went back down to Daegu. They were fine with checking that he was living well after meeting a good person, and did not think that they needed to bring up memories of his past.

However, Yoon Kwang Hun thought that the 4 people might be able to wash away the slight guilt they still felt as they watched Jun Hyuk grow up well, and flew to Brussels with them.

“Thank you so much for creating this kind of situation.”

The 4 people bowed their heads to Yoon Kwang Hun.

“Are you really going to just go back? You came all the way here.”

Yoon Kwang Hun looked at the 4 people and spoke carefully, but they only laughed.

“Mr. Yoon. We weren’t able to act as parents for even a day, but we have been able to release some of the guilt thanks to you. Thank you.”

Yoon Kwang Hun’s 4 ‘friends’ got on a plane that night to go back to Korea. Their faces had become considerably brighter since letting go of baggage that had been heavy on their hearts for over 15 years.

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“This kid. Isn’t he too much? What are we supposed to do if he shows a performance like this?”

The maestros who gathered backstage surrounded Jun Hyuk as though to threaten him.

“Exactly. Now, no matter who conducts, won’t it be compared to today’s choral concerto? Will we even be able to put it on stage with this fear? Ha ha.”

The maestros laughed while speaking as though joking, but they were not at ease. There had been a premiere with the composer’s conducting. The countless performances of choral concerto from now on will be continuously compared to that of today.

It is obvious that a performance that is faster and more aggressive than Jun Hyuk’s will be judged as imitating, and they have no choice but to fight it by trying to create a novel interpretation. But would a new interpretation be able to surpass Jun Hyuk’s performance?

How would they be able to surpass the brutality that expresses a death-defying beast... They cannot think of a way immediately.

“This praise is excessive. I was just hoping you would like it.”

“When did you become so modest? Where did the person who was arrogant in front of Beethoven go?”

“Are you still talking about that? It really is a misunderstanding.”

“No. It was a performance and work that was worthy of that. I’m being serious.”

Jun Hyuk’s face was flushed from the maestros’ compliments, when Tara came over. Then Jun Hyuk saw Yoon Kwang Hun, who had cautiously followed closely behind her.

“Oh, sir. I’m sure you saw the performance? What do you think? You’re not going to be

poignant and criticize me, are you?"

"Hey! Be quiet. Don't you need to introduce me to those people first?"

Yoon Kwang Hun looked more excited than Jun Hyuk did, and gestured to the maestros looking at Jun Hyuk and him. He had watched his guests from Korea catch a taxi to the airport before coming back to the theater right away. When Tara escorted him backstage and he discovered over 10 maestros, he thought his heart was going to stop.

His eyes were fixed on the maestros and he already forgot about Jun Hyuk.

"Oh, that's right... Sir. Don't do things like taking pictures with them..."

"Am I a child? Hurry!"

Jun Hyuk went to the maestros and spoke to them cautiously.

"This is my father... He's a huge fan of all of you."

"Oh, really? You're saying this is the great man who made a monster like you?"

Yoon Kwang Hun could not wait any longer and pushed past Jun Hyuk.

"This is an honor, Maestro. My name is Yoon."

Yoon Kwang Hun shook the hands of each person, and rapidly complimented each of them with respect and affection.

"Maestro, your Mendelssohn during the 2003 Munich concert was really the best."

"Bruckner's No. 8 Symphony was so perfect that it was comparable to Celibadache. I don't know how many times I cried because I was so overwhelmed."

Yoon Kwang Hun does not have Jun Hyuk's memory. But he did not leave out any praise as he shook the hands of each maestro. How many times had he listened to the albums for him to be able to remember all of that?

Jun Hyuk stared blankly at Yoon Kwang Hun. When Jun Hyuk could not wait any longer because of the next item of their schedule and pulled Yoon Kwang Hun's arm, Yoon Kwang Hun had already taken dozens of pictures with the maestros.

“Sir, stop and go back to the hotel. I’ll finish up my schedule today and go to the hotel. Your friends are waiting for you.”

“Huh? Who? Oh, friends? They all went back. I watched them go back to the airport.”

“What? They went back already?”

“Didn’t I tell you? Those friends aren’t people who love classical music. Anyway, you have to call me if you get dinner or drinks with these people. Got it?”

Jun Hyuk had to urge Yoon Kwang Hun out because even after he warned Jun Hyuk, he kept looking back as though he wanted to stay. When the maestros who told him to go to the after party once the competition is over left, Jun Hyuk went to be interviewed.

The reporters finished up interviewing the performers for today’s finals and were just waiting for Jun Hyuk to show up.

When he entered the room, the cameras flashed.

“Are you satisfied with today’s performance?”

As soon as Jun Hyuk sat down, questions came flooding in.

“Yes. It was a pleasant performance because I was able to work with such great people.”

“The 1st and 2nd performances were clearly different. Was that difference because of the soloists?”

“I guess that is half right. I wanted to bring out the soloists’ individuality, and I also wanted to try out different types of performances.”

“I do not understand. Unless you were thinking of 2 different versions while composing the song, isn’t it impossible to show such stark differences? We can tell just with the length of time for the performances. The 1st was 67 minutes. You reduced the 2nd to 59 minutes. There was the difference of a whopping 8 minutes. Couldn’t this only be seen as a difference in interpretation?”

Interpreting means that the conductor is building the performer and piece. It is inevitable that a work changes according to the conductor, but there has never been a

case where one conductor presented 2 interpretations, much less on the same day.

“Of course it is. The feeling I had when I was writing the song was more like that of the 2nd performance, but a lot of time has passed. It was enough time for a new interpretation to emerge.”

“Then does that mean that you will be continuing to bring out different interpretations?”

“I would like to if I can. Isn’t that the appeal of music – no – art? Hundreds of interpretations can come from one piece of art.”

The reporters became restless. This is a shocking statement. He will be conducting the same song in various versions? Is this possible unless he is arranging it? Is this possible because he wrote it?

While the reporters were thinking of these questions, one quick reporter threw out a question.

“Then when you conduct other composer’s songs from now on, do you intend to bring out the ‘appeal of art’?”

“If it is in the range of possibility, of course.”

He had used the phrase he used with Beethoven again. Range of possibility. Flashes burst. Though this time, the reporters’ reactions were different from then. They were full of the thought that it could be a possibility, and that it is not just nonsense.

“We cannot leave this question out. You compared with Beethoven – do you still think the same thing?”

“Well, I can’t really pull out now... I’ll leave that judgement to the criticism that will come out tomorrow.”

Tara was watching next to him, and took the microphone.

“As we are out of time, we will take the last question. And please refrain from questions regarding Beethoven. I believe that he has answered questions on this enough.”

“What are your future plans? Are you going to prepare a new piece?”

Tara answered the last question on his behalf again.

“He is currently preparing for a performance with the New York Philharmonic. We will let you know as soon as we have a definitive schedule. And Maestro Jun is working on a new piece without taking a break. Then we will be wrapping up the interview.”

Jun Hyuk came out of the room and looked relieved.

“I can go home now, right?”

“Of course. The reporters will be busy writing their articles for tomorrow too. The dorm you were staying in here was already taken care of.”

“Phew – What a relief. Oh right. Before I go home, I have to go to the hotel...”

“No. If you’re talking about Mr. Yoon, he was taken to the house. He’ll be waiting there.”

“Okay. Thanks, Tara.”

Tara saw Jun Hyuk smile and said what she needs to even though she had not planned on doing so.

“What do you think about meeting Maestro Boulez for a moment before you go?”

Jun Hyuk did not see, but Tara saw Pierre Boulez praising Jun Hyuk to the reporters.

“The ability to see a great conduct in a competition gauging rookies is itself a blessing. Though Jun was a participant in the composing portion, he is no longer a rookie if looking only at his conducting. It is not surprising even if he becomes the principal conductor of an internationally leading symphony orchestra.”

She had heard such high praises, and could not ignore it.

“He praised you a lot while interviewing with reporters about today’s performance. I think it’s right to talk to him.”

Jun Hyuk nodded and started walking. When he opened the door to Pierre Boulez’s office and walked in, the 4 soloists for tomorrow’s performance were drinking tea and chatting with the Maestro.

“Oh, Jun. Are you done with everything for today?”

“Yes, Maestro. I finished up the interviews as well.”

Pierre Boulez went to Jun Hyuk, held both of his hands, and sat him down next to him.

“I’m trying to erase the aftertaste of your performance today. Though it isn’t easy because it’s so strong. Ha ha.”

“If that’s a compliment, it’s too much. It’s the same even if it’s a fuss.”

“No, I’m being serious. You went through such a large song that fast, but to think you would finish it within an hour! It was too intense.”

Pierre Boulez’s worries were not his making a fuss. If not even he can get rid of that aftertaste, how will these 4 finalists who have to perform tomorrow feel?

He could tell the shock that the 4 people must have felt in their eyes and fingertips while watching Jun Hyuk’s performance. Their pupils shook throughout the performance, and their fingers did not stop trembling.

It is the most dangerous moment in a competition. They need to maintain the unique color they have created until now, but they lose that the moment they try to make a stronger impression than what they saw before.

“Jun, do you have anything to say to them? As the composer, not a conductor. I’m saying this because as you can see, they look like they’ve lost confidence.”

Jun Hyuk looked at the 4 people and scratched his head. Their performance cannot change just from hearing a few words. Pierre Boulez was asking him to say something that would help them exert their skill at the least.

“I’m sure you already know that the only thing you have to lean on in tomorrow’s performance is Maestro Boulez.”

It is not something that the 4 performers do not know. They just have not come out of the shock of the afternoon performance.

“Hm. You’ve all fallen into the trap of Beethoven’s name – no – the word.”

Jun Hyuk saw the same thing in each of their faces.

“You can’t be caught captive by the one image hidden in his music and what the critics are saying. It is the image of innovation.”

Beethoven is the first free musician. In the times before him, musicians created music on the request of people like the wealthy, royals in power, and archbishops ruling diocese.

In today’s terms, it was a time when music was contracted for delivery. A lot of money was required to perform symphonies and operas, so there was no attempt at composing them unless they were contracted. If they created and performed with their own money and failed, it would only be a matter of time before they lost everything. No one made such a venture.

Due to this, musicians were dressed as servants. The tights that came up to their knees were a symbol of this. When Mozart was in working under the archbishop in Salzburg, he even ran away to Vienna because he was lower in rank than the chef at the table.

Beethoven on the other hand, rejected this kind of commissioning. He was freed when he said the famous words,

“I write (the songs), they pay.”

Beethoven rejected the knee high tights, and wore pants. He did not take requests from people higher up, and made the music he wanted to. He rented salons and took money from the audience to reveal his new songs. He had used today’s concert culture for the first time.

And he succeeded. He earned enough to lead an affluent life.

“The song that you will be performing tomorrow has nothing to do with Beethoven. It is just another concerto. There are hundreds of interpretations to this song. It doesn’t need to be aggressive.”

The 4 performers felt Jun Hyuk’s words were empty. It is because Jun Hyuk had presented a more extreme conducting than Beethoven when he was telling him to erase Beethoven from their minds.

“I thought of this song’s interpretation this way.”

It was uncertain whether he was saying this to the performers or if he was looking for Pierre Boulez to agree with him. Jun Hyuk was looking out into the air.

“007’s James Bond was released in various versions. There are more being made now. James Bond’s first actor Sean Connery was sexy and elegant, and was humorous even in dangerous moments. He was always surrounded by beautiful women as well.”

Sean Connery’s James Bond was created to meet men’s standards as the ideal an rather than a spy.

“But what is today’s James Bond, Daniel Craig, like? He runs, rolls, gets hurt... He’s a serious spy who doesn’t even smile much. And most of the Bond girls are tough Amazons. They are completely different characters, but they are both James Bond.”

Pierre Boulez smiled. Jun Hyuk is Daniel Craig and he is Sean Connery.

“You are all James Bond of the 007 series that Maestro Boulez is making. If your individuality is combined with his directing, a new James Bond will be born. And I’m anticipating being able to see a James Bond with personality tomorrow.”

Pierre Boulez sincerely prayed that the 4 finalists, who still looked confused, would completely accept what Jun Hyuk said and create a new James Bond tomorrow.

Chapter 201

When Jun Hyuk and Yoon Kwang Hun went to the theater the next morning, they could only sit in the car and stare at each other because of the reporters that had come swarming to them.

“There’s nothing we can do about it. Don’t you need to foster the skill to get through reporters now? He he.”

Yoon Kwang Hun tapped Jun Hyuk’s shoulder and got out of the car first. The cameras flashed in his face, but they slipped away from him when he pointed to the car.

“Jun, all you have to do is walk slowly into the theater. There are no reporters who will block your path. Don’t frown, and smile. You don’t have to respond to questions. There will be reporters who try to get you to answer with weird questions. Just ignore them and keep walking.”

“Smile and keep walking. Okay.”

When Tara walked out first, the reporters stepped back and opened up the path. Jun Hyuk saw the reporters split like the Red Sea and thought that Tara would be like Moses if she just had a staff in her hand. He automatically broke out into a smile at this thought.

Once he entered the theater, the reporters sighed lightly. Now they need permission from the theater to continue filming. If they do not get approval, they will be kicked out of the theater without being able to cover today’s performance.

When Jun Hyuk collapsed into his seat, Yoon Kwang Hun was laughing in the next seat.

“Seems you did well from your expression.”

“Yes. It wasn’t hard.”

“Be good to Tara. I haven’t seen very many people who are good at her job as she is.”

“Yes. We’re trying to be friends. Don’t worry.”

When the audience was packed without any empty seats, the orchestra and chorus entered.

“In my opinion, the Belgian National Orchestra is pretty great. What do you think? You’ll know since you conducted them.”

“They’re significantly undervalued. It’s just an issue of their repertoire.”

While they chatted, the moderator appeared on stage. When he finished introducing today’s performers, conductor Pierre Boulez, 2 soloists, and the vocalists walked onto the stage.

Pierre Boulez climbed on the podium and raised the baton, smiling without the slightest bit of nervousness.



Unlike yesterday’s performance, the 1st part started with the melody of a slow and sorrowful violin and viola. When the stringed instruments’ bows moved slowly, the audience felt comfortable and buried their bodies deep in their seats.

Maestro Boulez basically declared that his music is different from Jun Hyuk’s extreme. He could not completely erase the intensity of the original, but it was enough to feel a cold winter to raise their coat collars.

But when the 1st part was ending, the orchestra became an obstacle to prevent the biting winds. The piano and violin dug in happily as though they had discovered a place to get away from the wind.

When the piano and violin completely melted in with the 2nd part, Jun Hyuk let out a low groan. It was natural as though they had been performing together from the beginning. Since Jun Hyuk too made a lot of effort in this area during rehearsals, he knew what a difficult moment it was.

Jun Hyuk glanced at Yoon Kwang Hun and saw that he was moving his hand a little and showing that he was lost in the music. When they entered the middle of the 2nd part, Yoon Kwang Hun’s eyes bolted open. Jun Hyuk also straightened his hip off of the back of his chair.

The 2nd part that he expressed with fear and unrest slowly started to change. The orchestra stirred the fierce winds as though freezing everything, but the piano and violin was maintaining a smooth melody as though still basking in a comfortable shelter.

‘Ho – So it’s this kind of performance.’

It is a piano and violin that do not mind the orchestra’s biting winds. A piano with a smooth and light touch, a violin that has a clear and graceful tone and free rubato (not bound to the beat). And a cantabile (as though singing).

Maestro Boulez is strict in dealing with the orchestra, but he gave the 2 soloists wings that let them fly freely.

“That man, he’s impressive.....”

Yoon Kwang Hun mumbled without realizing it. He had already looked at Jun Hyuk’s score carefully, hundreds of times. He could tell that the 2 soloists’ performances were breath-takingly straying from the score.

“Right? His confidence is impressive.”

Jun Hyuk mumbled quietly too.

The performance flowed freely so they could enjoy each sound. When the 3rd part was over, Pierre Boulez closed his eyes for a fairly long time. The audience’s anticipation for a great 4th part grew.

Starting with the 4th part, there is no longer freedom. The performance was faithful to the score and he led everything with strict conducting. The vocal soloists gave them exact sounds, making the audience think that they were cutting each syllable.

If Jun Hyuk had built the song with loud sound, Pierre Boulez made it so that they could not leave the standard frame. The chorus also sang as though it had been measured with a ruler.

That strictness is not very different from Beethoven. The last chorus was so elegant that it inspired reverence and the restrained sound filled the theater.

When Maestro Boulez put the baton down, thunderous applause filled the theater that

the chorus had disappeared from.

There were even sounds of 'Beethoven!' bursting from different parts of the audience. They do not know exactly why, but the 4th part was a perfect egress as though Beethoven himself had been conducting.

"Wow – He is showing that a choral concerto and choral symphony aren't very different. It's killer."

Jun Hyuk thought that it was a performance where he had to agree with Yoon Kwang Hun.

"Ha ha. Well it looks like I've taken a hit."

"If you look at just the 4th part, today's performance is much more like Beethoven."

"Yes. Even though he was making such a fuss when I saw him yesterday."

"Isn't it okay though? He's brought you a step closer to Beethoven."

"It's 100 times the burden. He he."

Tara watched them and stood up.

"Jun, Mr. Yoon. We need to hurry out. If we stay like this, I think we'll be trapped without being able to move in the lobby."

The 3 people slipped out among the audience that would not stop looking at the stage and applauding, to go backstage.

"Jun Hyuk. Are you going to meet the Maestro backstage right now?"

"Yes, probably."

"This is bad."

Yoon Kwang Hun was walking quickly, and frowned.

"What is?"

“I don’t have a single CD of Pierre Boulez’s. I’ve never heard him conduct... I can’t pretend I know him.”

“You heard it today. That should be enough.”

They urged their footsteps along, Yoon Kwang Hun in his happiness in meeting another maestro and Jun Hyuk in his curiosity concerning today’s performance.

Backstage, only the competition staff were moving busily. It seems the heros of the performance were still answering curtain calls and had not been able to leave the stage.

When they heard the applause die down and the the audience bustle to leave the theater, the performers came backstage.

“Jun, what do you think? Was it okay?”

When Pierre Boulez discovered Jun Hyuk, he asked his opinion on the performance first.

“The worrying you showed yesterday really was just a fuss. I’m embarrassed that I babbled like that.”

“Nonsense! The soloists were able to center themselves because of that.”

Pierre Boulez’s looked to the Asian pianist. The female pianist who shone most in today’s performance. It was a piano that Jun Hyuk had admired as well.

He had carefully anticipated Han Ye Ji’s win until yesterday, but he is not so sure now. He heard that she is Chinese, but the piano that came from her delicate physique was so free that he could not know its end.

“I told them to forget Beethoven, but wasn’t that performance Beethoven himself?”

Jun Hyuk looked back at Pierre Boulez.

“Ha ha. Was it? Honestly, I was Beethoven from the beginning. I mean from the moment I saw the score. I thought about changing the vocal part in the 4th part to German, but I couldn’t do that because I was scared of you.”

“Oh. That would have been good too. What do you think about doing the afternoon performance in German?”

“I would if I could... but the soloists might try to kill me. Ha ha.”

The audience must have the aftertaste of the perfect Beethoven performance they heard in the morning. If they sing in German in the afternoon, the audience will be 100 times more impressed.

“What is the afternoon performance like? Is it different?”

“How could it be? I don’t have the ability to play around with music the way I want to like you can. It’s the same as the morning performance. The difference would be the 2 soloists’ influence.”

Yoon Kwang Hun listened to their conversation and poked Jun Hyuk’s side.

“Oh, Maestro. This is...”

“It’s an honor to meet you like this, Maestro Boulez. My name is Yoon.”

Yoon Kwang Hun came forward before Jun Hyuk could finish speaking, and held his hand out.

“Oh, Mr. Yoon. I’ve heard a lot about you. The maestros yesterday said that you’re a sharp critic. They said they could tell how a genius like Jun could come out.”

Yoon Kwang Hun’s smile widened at Pierre Boulez’s praise. But Jun Hyuk was having trouble trying not to laugh. He had not been a sharp critic, but more of a groupie who laid out all types of compliments.

Jun Hyuk took Yoon Kwang Hun by the hand and dragged him away as he was complimenting Pierre Boulez.

“Sir. Let’s go since Maestro Boulez needs to prepare for the afternoon performance.”

“Oh right. What bad manners. Maestro Boulez, once the competition is over, I’d like to eat together and talk about music.”

“Of course, Mr. Yoon. It’s actually what I wanted to ask first. Oh, my friends and I will

have a simple get together once the competition is over, and you should come with Jun.”

When he says friends, he must be talking about the maestros. Yoon Kwang Hun was grinning from ear to ear at Pierre Boulez’s answer. Jun Hyuk took Yoon Kwang Hun by the hand when he could not leave, and quickly left backstage.

“What are you going to do? Are you going to watch the afternoon performance?”

“No. He said that it’s the same as the morning performance. I’m going to go check the soloists for tomorrow’s performance.”

Jun Hyuk is concerned about the soloists who need to perform tomorrow. If they saw the morning performance, they will be shaken. That is how great the performance was.

“Alright. Then you go first. I’m going to watch the afternoon performance and then go home.”

“Okay. I’ll send a car for you then.”

“It’s fine. I can take a taxi, so don’t go through the trouble.”

Jun Hyuk left the theater with Tara.

“Tara, bring the soloists for tomorrow’s performance. I’ll wait in the car. I think it’ll get noisy again if I run into the reporters. Let’s take the 2 people home.”

“Home? You’re going to practice at home?”

“Yeah. There’s a piano there. Tell the violinist to bring a violin.”

“Okay. I’ll be right back.”

The 2 people who followed Tara looked a bit excited. They looked full of anticipation because they were receiving a special lesson for tomorrow’s performance.

Chapter 202

“You’re nervous, right?”

When they arrived at home, Jun Hyuk brought out coffee and tried to put the 2 people at ease. But their expressions were still firm. Their unrest, anxiety, and worries had not gone away.

“I’m so anxious. Maestro Jun’s performance yesterday, especially the 2 performers in the afternoon performance, were really impressive.”

“I don’t even know how to express the freedom the pianist performed with in today’s performance.....”

The 2 performers could not get rid of the image of the competitors who had surpassed them, and had already lost confidence.

“To be honest, I thought that there wouldn’t be anyone to follow violinist Daniel from yesterday’s afternoon performance. I’ve watched his performance since the finals, but he really is in the lead.”

The violinist who is to perform with Jun Hyuk tomorrow, Michele Placido, has an honest personality like the Italian he is. He is blinded by the jealousy he felt while watching Danny.

The roommate of the young genius sitting in front of him. The lucky guy who was in the same room for over 1 year, receiving inspiration and enlightenment.

“Yes. I also think that Danny’s performance was the best. He showed overwhelming ability among the 6 violin finalists. Looking at skill alone, I expect he will win.”

The Italian violinist laughed despondently.

“Ha ha. Well, well. Even so, for you to say it so blatantly.....”

“But the win can’t be guaranteed.”

“Excuse me? Now what does that mean?”

When Jun Hyuk became inconsistent, the 2 people could only stare at him.

“There were a lot of mistakes. If the judges use a deduction system rather than judging the overall performance when scoring, he won’t have a lot of points. That’s the scoring method of a competition.”

The 2 people had not even known that Danny had made mistakes. There were parts where he strayed from the score, but it was because he had been so natural that it seemed he had done it on purpose.

“Alright. If it’s okay, can I give you a piece of advice?”

“Of course. Anything you say will be helpful now.”

The 2 people swallowed. Jun Hyuk is now an indisputable genius maestro. They remembered what he showed them during rehearsals. He is able to tell them exactly how to express a single note.

“You are all lucky.”

“Huh? Lucky?”

Does it mean that the goddess of the competition is coming for them? They could not understand exactly what he meant yet.

“You know who’s in the royal seats of the theater, don’t you?”

“Yes. Aren’t they the top maestros in Europe?”

“That’s right. Everyone gathered because I had an accident with the press. And they aren’t judges who check for mistakes to deduct points.”

“Oh!”

That is when the 2 people let out low exclamations. They understood what Jun Hyuk was trying to say.

“You know, right? Your paths as professionals have nothing to do with the judges. The

people who will call for you are the maestros.”

Competition goals are winning, but their real goals are to make themselves known to the world. Their ultimate goals are to show their music to the world and to stand on great stages.

There are over 10 maestros who are the tickets to these great stages.

“You’ll know if you saw the interview, but I’m going to be performing with the New York Philharmonic once the competition is over. I’m thinking of Danny as the violin soloist for that performance.”

A performer who stands out to a conductor heads straight for a great stage like this. They were both extremely jealous of Danny. The New York Philharmonic is not just a great stage, but the world’s best.

“Think about it. Showing your talent to a group of Europe’s maestros and showing your talent to 12 judges. Isn’t the conclusion too obvious?”

The 2 people could feel a flash pass through their heads. They could fully understand why Jun Hyuk had said that they are lucky.

“The real winners of this competition aren’t the people with high scores but the people who receive more calls from maestros.”

A performance with perfect technique, without error, cannot move the maestros’ hearts. They need to give performances that are full of soul in order to capture their hearts.

“So forget any thoughts about mistakes or being compared to others. You two just need to show your abilities to the fullest. Perform and take the challenge boldly.”

Their faces looked much more comfortable than they had in the beginning.

“Then, let’s practice. Forget mistakes and ensembles, and show me your real selves. There’s no orchestra here anyway.”

The 2 people listened to Jun Hyuk’s advice and focused on practicing until the sun set and darkness settled in. When they were going home, they left smiling after they thanked Jun Hyuk.

After seeing them off and returning home, Tara and President Isaac Stern were drinking tea in the living room.

“Isaac! When did you get here?”

“It’s been a while. I was in the kitchen with Tara because you were in the middle of practice. I have to see tomorrow’s performance since it’s the last one.”

President Stern spoke as though it was obvious. Is it not the hottest performance in the world of music right now?

“It’s broadcast on the internet and on cable...”

“I need to see it live. And there’s some business I need to take care of.”

“Business?”

“Yeah. The Belgian National Orchestra’s tour starts once the competition is over. Your choral concerto is inevitably going to be the main repertoire... They can’t have it for free. I need to negotiate the royalties. And it’s not just that. He he.”

Jun Hyuk became curious with President Stern’s sinister laughter.

“Is that strange laughter because there’s something else?”

“There’s a hail of phone calls from the record labels that saw your performance. They want to schedule recording right away. It’s not just the record labels. It’s a bit of an exaggeration, but there have been requests from symphony orchestras all over the world to perform your song.”

It is something joyful, not something sinister or strange. Jun Hyuk also felt pretty good, hearing that countless places wanted his song.

“Then it seems you’ll be pretty busy. Can you be spending time like this?”

“What? I don’t do that work myself. The employees work hard. I’m the company’s boss. Ha ha.”

“So you’re basically here for fun.”

“Watching you perform is also work for me. And there’s something I need to discuss with you.”

Isaac Stern stopped laughing, and his expression became serious.

“Once the competition is over, are you going to tour as well?”

“I don’t know. I don’t really want to.”

He has worked enough with the Belgian National Orchestra. It is also boring to conduct the same song for several months.

“Good. The composer’s participation in the tour isn’t included as a provision for the competition anyway. Then you’ll be able to start with the New York Philharmonic right away.”

“Okay. I’m anticipating that too.”

“But for the soloists... the piano and violin.”

“Yes.”

“Maestro Dimitri Carras wants Daniel, who performed with you yesterday. It seems he was quite impressed.”

“What do you think, Isaac?”

“I was surprised too. I thought he was just your roommate, but it was the birth of a great violinist.”

President Stern is so lost in Danny’s performance that he regrets that he has already signed on with a different management agency. If he performs with an outstanding conductor for a few years and is well conditioned, he is sure to take a top class position.

When President Stern was about to bring up the most important thing, Yoon Kwang Hun opened the door and came in. He must have been drinking because his face was red.

“Oh, Mr. Yoon. It’s been a while.”

“Mr. Stern. When did you get here? It’s really a pleasure to see you again.”

They embraced and showed their friendliness.

“Sir, you’re late considering the performance should have ended early.”

“Oh. I ran into the maestros again when I left the theater after the performance. They asked to eat together so... I had a glass of wine too. Ho ho.”

Jun Hyuk started laughing when he imagined Yoon Kwang Hun following the maestros around.

“I don’t think it was just one glass of wine. Looks like you drank a lot?”

“I don’t know. That’s not important. The important thing is that they wanted to be friends with me. They told me not to call them maestro and to just call them by their names. We exchanged numbers too. He he.”

Yoon Kwang Hun proudly wiping his phone screen was not very different from a man admiring his favorite young singer.

“How was the afternoon performance?”

“Of course it was great? The committee told me that the morning and afternoon performances were exactly 74 minutes long. There wasn’t a second in error.”

Once they started talking about the performance, Yoon Kwang Hun stopped joking and became serious.

“It’s a perfect interpretation and performance.”

“The critics said the same thing. The 19th century Beethoven conducted the song that the 21st century Beethoven wrote. I thought that was the most precise evaluation.”

President Stern spoke, laughing lightly.

“The greatest beneficiary in this year’s Queen Elisabeth Competition is Belgium.”

“Oh. Is that what it is?”

When Yoon Kwang Hun thought about the competition from the business end, President Stern could tell what he meant by the greatest beneficiary.

“They leapt past cable and internet live broadcasts will have reached the ceiling for advertising rates. It is by far the best in terms of topicality alone. The competition committee is about to give Jun a medal.”

Even in the world of classical music, a hot topic star is changing the field. Jun Hyuk has proved that he is a goose who lays golden eggs that bring in more revenue than the newly emerged stars in China.

“Mr. Stern. Go on about the New York Philharmonic.”

Tara had been listening quietly, but she spoke up so as not to lose out on something important.

“Oh right. I forgot for a moment. Jun, do you by chance want to play the piano?”

“The piano?”

“Well... Maestro Carras asked cautiously if you might become the choral concerto’s pianist.”

“That’s an okay thought.”

Yoon Kwang Hun became excited first. It has been a fairly long time since he has heard Jun Hyuk’s piano. On top of that, it would be him playing the piano on stage with the New York Philharmonic. His heart fluttered just imagining it.

“I guess you don’t really want to from the way you can’t answer quickly?”

“It’s not that... Is there really a need for me to do it when there are so many great pianists.....”

“Why? How many pianists are better than you when looking at skill alone?”

When Jun Hyuk did not immediately reject the idea, President Stern gained confidence.

“And we’re thinking of releasing the New York performance as an album. In my opinion,

your music is better in concert than in studio.”

“An album...”

Yoon Kwang Hun was about to say something, but stopped. He did not want to unnecessarily give Jun Hyuk the impression that he was pressuring him.

“Isaac, we’ll think about that issue once the competition is over. That’s okay, right?”

“Of course. You don’t have to do it if you don’t want to. There will always be a pianist who is willing to perform if it’s your work.”

Chapter 203

All of the broadcasting stations were preparing for live commentary for the last day of the competition finals. Large screens were installed in the lobby and outside of the theater out of consideration for the people who could not acquire tickets.

There was especially a lot of anticipation for Jun Hyuk, who had conducted in 2 different ways, in the thoughts that he might show yet another performance.

The biggest watching point is to watch conductors with 2 completely different styles in sequence to compare them. This kind of unique stage is hard to come by again.

The audience filling the seats did not stop applauding when Jun Hyuk appeared on stage. They are an audience that knows that there are manners that they need to maintain, but they were showing how shocked they were by his previous performances and their anticipation for today's.

Eventually, the moderator needed to come back on stage and calm them down.

The audience members gripped the edges of their seats and waited for the rollercoaster to take off.

The rollercoaster began on Jun Hyuk's signal. When the suspenseful gallop ended, there was applause but it showed signs of regret. It was a lacking performance for the people who had been watching throughout the entire competition. They had been expecting a completely different conducting, but today's performance was like that of his 2nd.

The only thing that lessened their disappointment was that it was a more aggressive performance with bolder soloists.

After a period of time for rest and lunch, Pierre Boulez's last performance started. A continuous tempo and unchanging conducting, the soloists playing freely. The performance gave them the same emotions.

All of the performances of the competition were over, and all of the finalists went on stage to thank the audience. It was the most dynamic performance of the Queen

Elisabeth Competition history, and a successful competition with constant news. It of course brought in the most amount of profit.

The 12 finalists could not leave the theater because they were waiting for the announcement of the judging results, while the conductors and orchestra celebrated their finishing up the competition well.

There were also people who needed to think hard and make serious decisions over the next 2 hours.

“We are judges right now. I’m sure you all know that the world’s attention is on us.”

The committee head’s stiff voice showed that she too is serious.

“The Queen Elisabeth Competition’s status could change in any way according to the results we make. That is why I would like to make a new suggestion.”

It is a great relief that there is a committee head to align them. If the standard is to deduct, it may be comfortable for the judges but the audience would not be able to understand it. Furthermore, if they consider the great maestros who watched the competition keenly, they get in a cold sweat.

“Let’s forget all about how many mistakes there were and the perfection of technique. There especially must not be a comparison of the 2 conductors.”

The element that skewed fairness most is the 2 maestros’ overwhelming conducting. They fully know that they need to think of the soloists’ performances while judging, but the pros and cons of the conductors kept popping up in their heads.

“So what are you thinking, Committee Head?”

“I had a question as I watched the 2 performances today. If I get to see Maestro Jun’s choral concerto in concert again, what kind of orchestra would be good for it?”

“Excuse me? You’re talking about a different orchestra all of a sudden?”

“Yes. I thought about it for the sake of fairness. A philharmonic that is not the Belgian National Orchestra. I thought of the Vienna Philharmonic.”

“Vienna?”

“If it is the Vienna Philharmonic, that is strictly classical music, how would they interpret and express the choral concerto? Like Beethoven? Or would they reproduce the brutishness that the composer, Maestro Jun, showed us? I had all kinds of thoughts.”

The committee head was smiling. Her first smile showed that just the thought of it was exciting for her.

“And I imagined again. If it were Berlin? Munich? London? And New York? I became happy just imagining it.”

“Hm... I see. I understand. You’re telling us to choose the 2 soloists who would be able to appear with all of those philharmonics, right?”

“Yes. That’s exactly it. My thoughts are that those 2 people are those most suitable to win.”

There were judges who could not accept the committee head’s thinking as well.

“But this isn’t an audition for performers in a concert. It is a competition. We cannot ignore objective evaluations. Aren’t you telling us to make an assessment based on a momentary feeling?”

An evaluation based on emotion without objectivity. This method is just the most personal measuring stick used when someone repeatedly asks about the evaluation and it is hard to respond.

“If it had been a normal competition like that of last year, I would not have needed to say this. But isn’t this year a bit of a special situation?”

The committee head responded while looking straight at the judge in opposition.

“Are you able to completely erase the orchestra and make an assessment based on the soloists’ performances alone? No, Maestro Boulez has already brought the incredible name of Beethoven into this competition. How would you be able to score his conducting – the 4th part in particular? Do you remember the piano and violin melody exactly?”

The judges cannot deny what she is saying. If they look at the 4th part alone, they do not remember the piano and violin solos so well that they can recall them exactly.

The entirety has just become one piece of music.

“And I’ll be honest. Think of the dozens of maestros who are in the theater now. If we judge on a deduction system, we’ll have to face their criticism first. The quality of the show and remote competition. Aren’t those the common criticisms? I don’t think it would be bad for our Queen Elisabeth Competition to be the first to break away from such obsolete methods.”

The conference room was encompassed in silence again, as though accepting the committee head’s words as a conclusion.



“I don’t think I would be able to do it if I was a judge.”

“Seems like it, right? There are too many variables to consider. The piece, conducting, the soloists’ abilities, and the ensemble.”

“There’s one other thing. He he.”

“Yes. The fearsome Beethoven!”

“No matter what the conclusion is, opinions are going to be divided.”

Opinions were even divided among the reporters and critics waiting for the judges’ decision in the theater lobby. The reporters held on to the critics in the lobby and kept asking for analyses and predictions on the results.

“If you were to personally give points, who would win?”

“I want to give the highest points for Jun’s 2nd performance. And that includes the soloists.”

“I thought Maestro Boulez’s first performance was better. I’d like to give the soloists higher points.”

The intended 2 hours for judging passed quickly and it was nearing 4 hours.

The reporters had known that judging would be difficult, but the fact that it has

already been 4 hours could become another topic of news.

There are often instances where altercations between judges elevate out of control. In the 1980 Chopin Competition, piano empress Marta Argerich made headlines when she resigned from her position as a judge in protest because a competitor, Ivo Pogorelic, was eliminated in the 3rd round. Marta Argerich is also the very person who won the competition in 1965.

Since this type of altercation can become bigger news than the competition itself, reporters welcomed the lateness of the results.

The 12 judges appeared on the provided platform after almost 5 hours passed.

The 12 finalists were trying to calm their anxiety along with their parents, teachers, and managers.

“First, we ask that you understand that it was a long wait. That is how difficult it was to distinguish between the finalists’ merits because everyone was so splendid.”

“The thing that was difficult to distinguish was probably the performance, not the finalists’ merits.”

One reporter mumbled quietly. People looked at that reporter, but no one told him off. They were all thinking the same thing.

When the murmurs quieted down in the lobby, the committee head held the microphone up again.

“We will start announcing with 6th place.”

The official languages of Belgium are Dutch, French, and German. The committee head spoke in French and there were interpreters for Dutch, German, and English next to her.

“Piano, Michael Looper. Violin, Hayakawa Touku.”

The 2 people who performed in Jun Hyuk’s 1st conducting were in 6th place. The 1st performance, where the flow and feeling of each part changed severely. The soloists of the performance that the Italians had been so enthusiastic about, were in 6th place together.

“There was no good in the orchestra and conductor hiding the soloists’ disadvantages and attempting to bring out their advantages.”

“That had been too obvious. The attempt to cover up for their shortcomings might have been proof that they aren’t able to handle the choral concerto.”

Critics spoke into the microphones that reporters had out in front of them as though commentating a sports match.

“5th place.....”

The committee head announced the finalists’ ranking in a dry voice. Each time their names were called, there were those who showed bittersweet smiles and those who laughed in disbelief. There were even people who blamed the conductors for their not winning rather than their own abilities.

The committee head made up for their lateness by announcing the results quickly.

“2nd place... Piano, Ye Ji Han. Violin, Michael Placido.”

2nd place were 2 people who had gone on stage with Jun Hyuk. Michael Placido is an Italian violinist who had surprised even Jun Hyuk in today’s last performance by creating a world of his own on stage.

He shook the hearts of people listening with a natural melody like flowing water and detailed and subtle representation, rather than sharp and sparking technique.

He was not shaken by Jun Hyuk’s aggressive orchestra, and his violin did not prick the ears of the audience or make them nervous. He impressed them with an elegance like flower petals shaking in the wind and a colorless, odorless purity.

Han Ye Ji could have been disappointed that she had not won as expected, but she was making the effort to keep her composure. Rather, Professor Jeon Hye Jin had tears in her eyes as she held tightly to Han Ye Ji’s hand.

Professor Jeon Hye Jin’s eyes were not glistening with tears because they had lost the win. She had been thinking that the winner is the remaining pianist whose name has not been called yet.

It is that she is regretful that she had not been able to meet Han Ye Ji sooner. If they

had met when she was in middle school at the latest, she has the qualities to try for the win in the Chopin Competition...

It would be shocking since Han Ye Ji had said that she poured all of her ability into the performance. She also worried that Ye Ji might be discouraged and fall into a slump.

“Professor, you can’t be like this. I’m okay. I need to try it for real now.”

“You’re okay?”

“Yes. I realized on the stage with Jun Hyuk. The feeling of the piano’s melody riding my fingertips and coming into my body. My entire body was filled with notes... The sound wasn’t coming through the piano but through my body... It was that kind of feeling.”

Professor Jeon Hye Jin wiped her tears with a handkerchief as she watched Han Ye Ji speak firmly.

“Did you smoke weed before you went on stage or something? I heard that people who are high feel like the music crawls into their bodies.”

“Professor!”

“I’m joking. I see you still have strength from the way you’re yelling at me.”

Professor Jeon Hye Jin saw that Han Ye Ji was not frustrated, and worried less. It seems that she will not fall into a slump because her core is solid.

The image of Han Ye Ji aiming to reach higher is actually beyond what she expected.

“Yes. I’m thinking of trying out for the Chopin Competition this time. I need to win.”

While Han Ye Ji and Professor Jeon Hye Jin were comforting and reassuring each other, the 2 people whose names had not yet been called were cheering.

“The winners. Piano, Christine Zhao. Violin, Daniel Laferriere.”

The piano winner is a Chinese American. In Pierre Boulez’s first performance, she had brought out cheers from the audience with her smooth and light touch, and clear and elegant cantabile.

She did not just show a performance that was beautiful, simple, precise, with sensitivity and liveliness, but also an objective response to the orchestra and reverence for the song.

When Danny's manager hugged him and picked him up, he looked around. Before enjoying the moment, he wanted to find Jun Hyuk and send him a look of thanks at the least. But Jun Hyuk was rejoicing his win somewhere else.

The moment the winners were confirmed, the general public in the theater lobby cheered. The audience's cheering showed that the judging had been faithful to the most universal feelings.

"It was a wise choice on the judges' part."

"Yes. The ranking will allow them to avoid criticism from maestros, who have the fiercest words."

"So it's not a system where they look for mistakes and deduct points. We cannot tell whether it was a mistake or an intended rubato, but it is definitely subject to point deductions in a competition. But the judges accepted the rubato. It's proof that they only thought about the quality of the performance."

The judges quietly left the theater as critics chatted. Reporters flashed their cameras at the 2 winners and held their microphones out to them.

Chapter 204

Pierre Boulez and Jun Hyuk, who had been monitoring the results backstage, clinked their champagne flutes.

“The results show that the judges really tried to reduce the noise. What do you think?”

“I have different thoughts on the ranking, but I don’t have any disagreements on the winners. I think they had plenty of skill for it. It’s just that I was nervous because Danny made a lot of mistakes, but the judges made a bold choice.”

“Danny’s disadvantage was a passive way of playing, but he found a broad attitude through this performance. He’ll grow quickly now.”

While they spoke, the members prepared to go back. The long journey was complete. Everyone looked lighthearted.

“Maestro Jun. I won’t be able to forget this year’s competition for the rest of my life. It was a blessing for our Belgian National Orchestra to premiere such a great piece and to perform with the 21st century Beethoven.”

“It was an honor for me. You did really well, bandmaster.”

Jun Hyuk shook hands with over 100 performers and did not hold back on heartfelt praises.

“Jun. My friends are drinking and waiting. What do you think? Mr. Yoon will be with them too.”

The maestros had begun a party of their own as soon as the competition performance was over. They need to go back to their own cities tomorrow. As it is difficult to all gather in one place, they were going to spend the last night of the competition gaily.

“Sorry. I have something to do... It’s a pity, but I must go home.”

Pierre Boulez tapped Jun Hyuk on the shoulder, who had an uncomfortable expression.

“It’s a pity but it can’t be helped. There are still official events left over, so let’s push our time together back.”

“Yes. I’d like to see you again before I go back to New York.”

“Oh right. You said you’ll be performing with the New York Philharmonic, right?”

“Yes.”

“If I can, I’ll try to make time and go.”

“Thank you, Maestro.”

Jun Hyuk went home and Pierre Boulez went to the restaurant where all of the maestros were gathered.

He could only hear Yoon Kwang Hun’s voice in the restaurant with more than 10 maestros.

“Imagine it. A 15 year old kid who has never properly heard classical music, listening to Marlowe’s symphony and immediately memorizing over 100 melodies. It was phenomenal.”

“Ohh.....”

“Goodness. Even if experts could memorize scores, they could never memorize all of them by part.....”

“It’s not just that. He wrote a piano sonata as soon as he started playing the piano. The work that came out after that was Inferno.”

Yoon Kwang Hun was talking about the moment he met Jun Hyuk to each moment he discovered a phenomenal aspect of him, and the maestros were only staring at him as though watching a breathtaking movie.

From Yoon Kwang Hun’s momentum and the maestros’ expressions alone, it felt like this would not end even if they spent all night like this.



“No, bend your knees a little more. Move your hands a little more rhythmically and graciously.”

“This is driving me nuts. I didn’t know I’d have to express elegance with my body. The piano would be easier.”

“Stop grumbling and try it again.”

Jun Hyuk had to keep moving his wrist as though conducting. Tara taught him how to greet for a while before he spoke to President Stern,

“Isaac. Do I have to do this?”

“Of course. That’s the highlight. He he.”

President Stern kept laughing because he was having fun watching Jun Hyuk comfortable with his awkward movements.

“How about I don’t do it with my schedule as an excuse?”

“What schedule? Even if you really had an urgent schedule, you would have to push it back. A spokesperson for the royal family called directly to ask that you attend.”

President Stern waved his hand to tell Jun Hyuk there is no chance, and did not stop laughing.

“Isn’t the winner’s feast honestly for the old queen who is retired with nothing else to do? It is to sponsor the competition, but it’s just a hobby that the old royalty gets involved in once in a while, isn’t it?”

President Stern laughed while clapping at Jun Hyuk’s sarcastic remark.

“Ha ha ha. Precisely. You want to try saying what you just said in front of the old queen? It’ll become an incredible typhoon that gets rid of your statement on Beethoven at once.”

“My heart isn’t strong enough for that.”

Jun Hyuk started moving his wrists and knees again.

“Then just laugh a bit, take pictures, and eat dinner. Even if they’re a royalty without power, they’re the target of envy in America. If you build up a relationship with them, you’ll stand out in New York social circles.”

European royalty may not have political power, but it is a symbol of tradition. The white immigrant population of America wants to protect the European royal family, from which their ancestors came.

On the day of the feast, Yoon Kwang Hun could not hold back his laughter when he saw Jun Hyuk leaving all dressed up.

“Wow~ This dork’s all grown up. You’re even going to a feast in a European palace. Eat slowly. I heard that it’s going to be an over 10 course meal. Ha ha ha.”

Yoon Kwang Hun spoke as though making fun, but he was laughing to hide his getting choked up. The scruffy little boy who had appeared in front of him is now wearing a clean suit and getting in a limousine. And he’s been born again as the protagonist of a royal family’s feast.

He is proud because it is like seeing Jun Hyuk spread his wings and fly high into the sky in reality.



Victor Hugo called Brussels’ Grand Palace the most beautiful plaza in the world, and it was designated one of 3 European plazas as UN World Heritage Sites in 1998.

As though showing off the splendor of when Brussels was once a trading center in Europe, the plaza is surrounded in late 17th century Gothic and Baroque style buildings.

The beautiful buildings created when city government building and king’s palace, Royal Palace, and Brussels Province of Brabant were the capital of Brussels, excluding Duke Brabant’s house are merchant guild houses. This shows that it was one the 4th largest trading country.

Jun Hyuk’s car went past the guards at the Royal Palace’s front door and into the

palace. The inside of the palace, decorated in the style of the Versailles Palace in the Louis dynasty by Leopold II, also acted as a museum displaying royal relics and collections.

When Jun Hyuk entered the banquet hall called the 'Throne Hall' with a crystal chandelier hanging on its high ceiling, the 20 finalists of each part and the competition committee members had glasses in their hands as they were hanging out.

Danny discovered Jun Hyuk, quickly ran over to him, and was about to hug him when he stopped. He cannot make a crease in Jun Hyuk's clothes when he has dressed up so well for the first time in a while.

"Danny, congratulations on the win. Be proud of it because the performance really was great enough to win."

"Jun, thanks so much. I keep owing you."

"Good. Don't ever forget it. He he."

Danny did not let go of his hands, looked him up and down, and whistled.

"Jun. Oho – You look good. You look like a runway model."

"Stop talking nonsense. Do you by chance know the etiquette for places like this?"

"I know to a certain extent because my family is French, but there's not much to it. Oh right. Eat slowly. It's really embarrassing if you finish eating first."

"Great. You stay right next to me. Let me know quietly if there's anything I need."

Danny chuckled as he watched Jun Hyuk, full of tension. He realized why he had told him to stay next to him.

"He he. That's not up to me. The seating arrangements have already been decided for the banquet hall."

"Damn it. What is this? We should just sit wherever and eat. They're assigning seats?"

"I don't think that's the problem. I heard in passing that you're at the same table as the Queen. You and Maestro Boulez."

“What?”

Danny watched Jun Hyuk’s blank face and laughed.

“It’s a given that the conductors sit at the highest seats.”

When Jun Hyuk turned pale, the finalists gathered to him. Everyone knows that the most important person here is not the old Queen or Maestro Boulez.

Before participating in the competition, Jun Hyuk was just a young composer who wrote one innovative song of modern music. He has now become the 21st century Beethoven who shook up the competition.

Everyone who had said that he was a competitor because of his age now completely erased those thoughts. They fully recognize that from now on, they must wait on this young maestro’s choices.

Jun Hyuk gave belated congratulations to the finalists around him and they complimented each other with the finalists telling him that they are waiting to perform with him again.

Then, people wearing clothes that can be seen in movies came in to escort the people waiting in ‘Throne Hall’ into the banquet hall.

Maestro Boulez pat Jun Hyuk on the back and smiled brightly.

“Jun, don’t be so nervous. Just think of her as a pleasant woman. She’s not as formal as you’d think.”

“She won’t show up wearing a crown, will she?”

“Ha ha. Probably not. If she does, I’ll laugh.”

“Do you know her well?”

“Yeah. Our orchestra always participates in royal events.”

While the two were chatting, Queen Faviola entered wearing a modest dress. Behind her, Queen Mathilda the current king Rudolph II’s wife, came in as well.

“How strange. She doesn’t normally appear at official events.”

“Who? Are you referring to that young woman?”

“Yeah. She’s the current Queen of Belgium, Mathilda.”

The 21 finalists walked to the front of the banquet hall as they were told to do from the royal’s staff. The two queens exchanged greetings with each of the 21 finalists. Queen Faviola spoke words of congratulations while Queen Mathilda only followed her quietly.

The finalists lightly touched their lips to their white gloves, the queens met eyes with the finalists and held both of their hands, before passing by.

“Maestro Jun.”

The young queen who had only smiled as she walked by, stopped in front of Jun and called him by his name.

“Yes, your majesty.”

“I saw the broadcast on TV, but your conducting was really surprising. I would like to see you perform for myself one day.”

“It’s an honor.”

Jun Hyuk recalled the elegant hand gestures he learned yesterday, and politely bowed.

When the two queens sat at their table, the finalists also went back to their seats.

Queen Faviola stood up and held her champagne glass high.

“First, congratulations to all 21 finalists who received high scores in the Queen Elisabeth Competition. And.....”

Once the queen’s toast was over, the food started to come out. Jun Hyuk did not say a word because of the two queens at his table. Instead, he just ate slowly to the pace of other people eating.

He needed to avoid the mistake of eating hurriedly and ending up done with his meal

before anyone else. Did Yoon Kwang Hun say that there would be 10 courses? When he thought that nearly all of the food had come out, he started to relax. It is almost over.

“Maestro Jun, you aren’t talking very much.”

Jun Hyuk had been keeping his head down but bolted upright when the young Queen Mathilda addressed him.

“When I heard your performance, full of such passion and madness, I felt a thrill that sent chills through my body. Meeting you in person, I can’t believe you conducted like that because you’re so quiet.”

“Your majesty, Maestro Jun’s true self comes out when he is standing on the podium or in front of an instrument. This shy image is fake. Ha ha.”

Pierre Boulez spoke in jest instead of Jun Hyuk, who was too taken aback to speak.

“Oh right. The Queen said that she was upset because she heard the music of all performers except one.”

The committee head, sitting at the same table, spoke as she looked at Jun Hyuk.

“Excuse me?”

What is this out of the blue? There’s no way? Jun Hyuk took a sip of his water.

“Maestro Jun, I heard that you’re an outstanding pianist. Can we hear you play?”

Queen Mathilda spoke to Jun Hyuk as if she had been waiting for this. It seems to be a script well carried out by the committee head and queen. Jun Hyuk waved his hand as he spoke,

“There are 6 amazing pianists here. I won’t because I don’t have the confidence to give you a better performance. I might ruin the feast.”

It was as though time had stopped at the table. The darkness was spreading to the next table. The committee head’s face had turned sheet white. Even Pierre Boulez, who had been relaxed and laughing, coughed.

No one had expected that Jun would reject the queen's request.

'What? Did I make another mistake?'

Chapter 205

He was sure that he had made a mistake from Queen Faviola's expression. The feast's hostess had asked politely. And it is courtesy to request to hear a musician's music if invited. But Jun Hyuk who had rejected without a particular reason was being ill-mannered.

Jun Hyuk looked at Queen Mathilda and spoke up in order to clear the situation,

"And honestly, there's something people like more than my piano or conducting."

'Damn it. I'm doing all sorts of things.'

"I'm sure you'll like it much more than my piano."

Jun Hyuk pushed his chair back and stood up. He spoke to the other tables.

"Alright. Everyone, look at the 3 glasses in front of you. Wine, champagne, and the last is water, right?"

Everyone's attention shot over to Jun Hyuk.

"When I give you the signal, take your fork and lightly tap any one of the 3 glasses. Like this."

Jun Hyuk used his fork to tap the 3 glasses one by one.

"You can't hit all 3 glasses like I did. Just pick one, please."

Everyone held their forks in their hands and looked at the glasses in front of them, including the queen.

"Alright. One, two, three."

As soon as Jun Hyuk said 3, the sound of forks and glasses clinking spread out.

Jun Hyuk moved his finger for a moment and laughed quietly.

“Wine, 24 people. Champagne, 26 people. And water was 18 people. Is that right?”

Everyone looked astonished. Does this mean he distinguished between the sounds that rang at the same time? Someone needed to check, but Jun Hyuk did not give them the time to.

“And...”

Jun Hyuk flicked his finger. He met eyes with the attendant and spoke,

“3 people have completely empty glasses. One person is wine and two people are champagne.”

As soon as Jun Hyuk spoke, the people with the empty glasses held them up high. They could see one wine glass and two champagne glasses. This basically proved that Jun Hyuk’s numbers were correct.

Jun Hyuk smiled when he saw that the two queens’ jaws had dropped.

“What do you think? Isn’t this much more fun than a piano performance?”

The two queens could not respond because they were still in shock.

“Then shall we raise the level of difficulty?”

Jun Hyuk held his fork up again.

“This time, we’ll include all of the tableware. Before that, I’ll check to see what sound each makes.”

Jun Hyuk hit each of the plates on his table with his fork to check the sounds they make.

“Alright, everyone. Again. One, two, three.”

As soon as Jun Hyuk’s signal came, a sound with more variety rang this time.

Jun Hyuk picked up the plates on his table one by one.

“There were 8 people who hit this plate. Please raise your hands.”

Precisely 8 people raised their hands. People started murmuring when they confirmed the number.

Jun Hyuk said the numbers by plate and glass, and people shouted or whistled when the numbers matched up.

“Hm... There’s always that one person who is doing something else. The person who hit the table instead of a plate. And there’s someone who hit the chair leg.”

There was suddenly clapping. When Queen Mathilda smiled brightly and clapped, everyone yelled bravo and applauded Jun Hyuk.

“How is this possible? I saw it with my own eyes, but I can’t believe it.”

Queen Mathilda was looking at Jun Hyuk, wide-eyed.

“Your majesty. Maestro Jun is able to differentiate between the sounds that people in an orchestra of over 200 make. And that’s for a performance that goes over 1 hour. This right now is really easy for him.”

When Pierre Boulez politely explained on Jun Hyuk’s behalf, the two queens had looks of disbelief again.

‘Whew – This means I haven’t made a mistake, right?’

The cold air inside had become warm again with Jun Hyuk’s magic show.

“Maestro Jun.”

“Yes, your majesty.”

“You said you’ll be performing with the New York Philharmonic, right?”

“Yes, that is right.”

“I’d like to make something to do there if I can, just to go watch you perform.”

President Stern had said that knowing the royal family will be helpful in the future, but Jun Hyuk had made the two queens into his fans.



“Jun. Why didn’t you play the piano? Squash the pianists’ energy.”

Danny spoke in regret in the returning limousine after the feast.

“Danny. Will you play the violin if the queen asks you to?”

“Of course. It’s an honor.”

“Ugh – Why can’t you get your senses?”

Jun Hyuk poked Danny’s side, looking at him pathetically.

“What?”

“You’re a professional performer. You need to be paid to perform. Whatever the situation is. What honor...”

“What?”

“I only perform for free if it’s a charity.”

“Are you saying you refused to play because of that?”

Danny was shocked in disbelief.

“No, not exactly... But now that I think about it, that’s what I should do. Look. They said they’ll come for the New York performance. Ha ha.”

Danny looked at Jun Hyuk’s joking laugh and shook his head.

“The Belgian queen’s salary is \$2 million. Why should I perform for them for free? From now on, there are no performances except at events where the rich are donating money.”

“Is that so? Then why did you show them a good time with your perfect pitch?”

Danny smirked at Jun Hyuk, who looked as though he had made a tremendous decision. Jun Hyuk is greatly mistaken.

“I can’t be paid to do that. And the atmosphere had gotten so cold.”

“So you do know. If you really hadn’t done anything, it would have been a big deal that you have no manners.”

Danny talked about the tacit etiquette that exists between the host and guest.

“Inviting a musician and requesting to hear his music means they enjoyed the music that much. It would have been more ill-mannered if we had only eaten and she hadn’t asked to hear your music.”

“Really? Then I have to perform at places like that from now on?”

Danny sighed.

“It looks like you were taught from the way you greeted the Queen. You weren’t told anything?”

“Damn it. Tara only showed me how to exchange greetings and didn’t tell me the really important things.”

“No one would think that you would outright reject the Queen’s request. That’s the same for Tara.”

Danny kept sighing.

“If you had played the piano today and that had been great, the Queen would have donated on her own capacity. She could give it to you... or the competition committee.”

“I see.”

“It’s okay. You showed them something more incredible just as you said.”

Danny jabbed Jun Hyuk’s side in revenge. Jun Hyuk looked at Danny and remembered something.

“Oh right, Danny. You’re going to tour with the finalists, right?”

“Of course. I am the winner. Ha ha.”

“Listen carefully because I’m telling you in advance. Of course a formal request is going to go through your manager.”

“What is it?”

“You know that I’m going to be performing with the New York Philharmonic, right?”

“Yeah. Conducting for the New York Philharmonic. And with your song at that! Amazing.”

Danny’s heart started beating with anticipation. Jun Hyuk can choose the violin soloist to go up on his own stage. Has he chosen him as the soloist?

“No. Maestro Carras is going to be performing my choral concerto. I’m conducting Beethoven’s choral symphony.”

“Oh! Really? I thought you were doing the choral concerto. The 21st century Beethoven is conducting the choral symphony of Beethoven from 200 years ago? That’s incredible.”

“We’re switching because it’s for an event. Anyway, Maestro Carras is looking at you for the choral concerto violin soloist.”

“What? Really?”

Danny could not believe that Maestro Carras himself had singled him out.

“Yeah. I wanted you to be the one to do it too, but Maestro Carras saw you first.”

“Jun, you really didn’t arrange it?”

If the composer is stubborn, soloists can be appointed according to his wishes. Danny knows well enough that Jun Hyuk is not one to tell such lies, but he wanted to make sure.

“I’m telling you I didn’t! He watched you perform and chose you. He called the day we performed. This means he didn’t pick you because you’re the winner. You were chosen on your performance alone.”

“Yes!”

He had finally been called by one of the top 3 philharmonics in the world. On top of that, the performance is a special event. It is obvious that it will receive the entire world's attention. Danny jumped inside the car.

"Danny, it's not something to just be happy about. You need to think hard about it. I just thought that it was a good thing when I first heard, but this could just be twice. It's a performance that finishes after doing it 3 times at the most. But the tour with the Belgian National Orchestra is 2 months. Discuss with your manager to see which is better and make your decision.

Danny quickly shook his head.

"Of course it's New York. It's a special event, but it becomes a completely different matter following the kind of performance I give. And performing with Maestro Carras is an incredible opportunity. Every word he says is a lesson."

"Then I'll call Stern Corporation now to consult with your manager."

Danny could not hear Jun Hyuk. He was already imagining himself standing on stage with the New York Philharmonic.

Chapter 206

“I heard you got over something that could have been a big problem? You’re good at handling yourself now.”

“You already know about it?”

“The committee called to say you knocked 10 years off their life. You gave them a great show?”

President Stern is happy that Jun Hyuk is able to get himself out of trouble on the spot.

“I barely got past it.”

“It wasn’t barely. You did really well. Anyone can make a mistake, but resolving it isn’t easy.”

While President Stern was praising Jun Hyuk, employees of Stern Corporation were moving busily inside the house. They were already preparing to go back to New York.

“Isaac. Are you going back tomorrow?”

“Yeah. Maestro Carras is making a fuss for me to hurry back. I think he wants to do the performance as soon as possible.”

“Oh right, what about Danny? Can you match his performance schedule?”

“Of course we need to match it. There’s no soloist who will reject the New York Philharmonic. We’re going to make adjustments with the committee. The committee won’t force a tour when a finalist has a great opportunity either.”

Tara already has Jun Hyuk’s luggage packed up as well. They will be leaving early in the morning.

Jun Hyuk looked at Yoon Kwang Hun.

“What about you?”

“I have to go to Korea. I’ll go see you when you perform with New York. Beethoven is glaring at you. Do well.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll make him so surprised he’ll go back into his grave.”

“This kid is getting worse by the day. You don’t know modesty.”

A phone rang when Yoon Kwang Hun was about to hit Jun Hyuk’s head.

– Kwang Hun?

“Huh? Lawyer Baek. What is it?”

Lawyer Baek Seung Ho’s voice over the phone became urgent.

– You’re in Belgium now, right? You haven’t left yet?

“Yeah. Why? Is something going on?”

– Phew. That’s a relief.

Baek Seung Ho let out a long sigh and went back to his normal voice.

– Don’t come here for a while because it’s crazy.

“What is? What are you talking about?”

– What do you mean what is it? Of course it’s because of Jun Hyuk. His winning, his conducting, the critics calling him the 21st century Beethoven – all of it. I’ve been suffering since the morning instead of you and I just ran away. It’s so bad I can’t even do my work.

The public shows more interest in the winners of the performance portions than they do in the composition portion. But as the competition was ending, the international media reported more on Jun Hyuk’s statement, conducting, and song than they did on the performing winners.

The Korean media finally realized this Queen Elisabeth Competition’s core and headlines were covered in the ‘Korean Born’ that the nation is celebrating.

“But what? Why can’t I go?”

– If you come back, they won’t leave you alone. They’ll already be waiting for you at the airport and cafe.

Cable networks are already requesting to film documentaries on Jun Hyuk. Considering not just the win but also the next schedule, or performing with the New York Philharmonic, it is an awesome ordeal. The honor of having the first Korean to conduct his own song was enough to bring out the nation’s enthusiasm.

“Hey! Jun Hyuk is going to perform Beethoven’s choral symphony. The standing conductor of the New York Philharmonic will be performing Jun Hyuk’s song. They can’t even tell the difference between a symphony and concerto?”

– Is that important? Anyway, there’s only news on Jun Hyuk on TV today.

“So? What do you want me to do?”

– Go to New York with Jun Hyuk for now. You’ll have to hold a combined interview with the Korean reporters there. Or it’ll just stay noisy.”

“What do I do about the cafe? I can’t leave it empty for so long.”

– Nothing happens with the cafe regardless of whether or not you’re there.

When Yoon Kwang Hun had nothing to say, Baek Seung Ho’s yelled,

– Ugh! Kwang Hun! I’m telling you to give a refreshing interview in New York and then come back! Let me live. I’m an employee who needs to go to work. If you don’t want to, you can come in right away. Then you’ll be swept over by the reporters instead of me, so that’s fine with me. You don’t understand even when I’m saying this thinking of you.

“Alright. I’ll talk to President Stern about it.”

– Do well this time. People can’t buy Jun Hyuk’s 1st album because there aren’t enough of them because of the articles. He appeared on music charts again within a day. Rake it all in for once. Hang up.

Yoon Kwang Hun got off the phone and told Jun Hyuk and President Stern about the

current situation in Korea. Jun Hyuk was so happy he could leap around.

“Good! You can stay in New York with me for the time being.”

Yoon Kwang Hun is hesitating because Jun Hyuk is staying in the apartment that President Stern lent him. On the other hand, it would be strange to leave a house that has more than enough space for 2 people and stay in a hotel.

“You should do that, Mr. Yoon. I’ll take care of the interview with the Korean press you mentioned.”

President Stern made an offer that Yoon Kwang Hun could not refuse when he kept hesitating.

“If you go to New York, you should get dinner with Maestro Carras and talk about music...”

“Thank you, Mr. Stern. I’ll make sure there are no inconveniences because of me. Then I’ll stay with Jun Hyuk for a bit.”

Yoon Kwang Hun quickly took President Stern’s hand.



Jun Hyuk took out a bundle of scores on the private plane back to New York.

“Take a look at this.”

“When did you write this?”

“Whenever I had time in Brussels. I made it into a short song.”

Yoon Kwang Hun, President Stern, and Tara quickly began reading through the score.

The 3 people sat with the score on the table between them but were no longer surprised. They are already aware that he can easily write songs like this. President Stern was the only one who had any type of reaction because it is not an abstruse contemporary piece.

“These are 5 songs of 5 minutes?”

“Yes.”

“What is it? Feels like stringed instruments from the way there is a lot of portamento (sliding from one note to the next).”

President Stern thought that Jun Hyuk had prepared a solo violin piece for Danny who would be in New York.

“No. It’s not the strings, but soprano vocals.”

“What? Soprano? Are you thinking of Laura?”

“Yes. I was hoping you would bring Laura Goldberg in.”

Jun Hyuk automatically smiled while thinking of Laura Goldberg’s beautiful tone.

President Stern spoke as he looked at the score,

“Then you need to work on the lyrics. Hm... I’ll have to look into a lyricist. Is there anything you’re thinking of? Like a poem.”

“No. It doesn’t need lyrics.”

“What? You don’t need lyrics?”

“Yes. I wrote each song to respond to one sound. The songs are titled I, A, E, O, U. I’m going to have her sing with just 5 collections.”

The 3 people had been calm until now, when their expressions changed. They knew it had been too banal. With lyrics, it is just another song. Yoon Kwang Hun in particular thought that considering the melody alone, Jun Hyuk has a lot of other songs that are more beautiful. Jun Hyuk is not one to make a song that is lesser to hand over to them.

“So you want to take on another new challenge?”

Yoon Kwang Hun looked at Jun Hyuk, urging him to confess his secret.

President Stern put the score down and spoke to Yoon Kwang Hun,

“No, Mr. Yoon. We can’t say that it’s completely new. There are already works that have

been created with the human voice without any meaning to them. The difference is that the melody of Jun Hyuk's song is beautiful."

Yoon Kwang Hun's expression did not change even after President Stern's explanation. He fully knows that Jun Hyuk is not one to transform or rehash something that someone else has already done.

"Isaac. It is a new challenge. She needs to sing these songs without an accompaniment."

"What? You're saying it's an unaccompanied solo?"

The ability to deliver a message will fall because there are no lyrics, and the aria cannot stop because there is no accompaniment. She needs to express the emotions with the melody, tempo, and tone alone.

"Aren't there a lot of recitals for instruments without accompaniments?"

Ultimately, Jun Hyuk is trying to implement an instrument that makes one sound. With just the voice of a soprano.

"Well....."

President Stern bit his lip as he realized the meaning behind Jun Hyuk's song. He is not concerned about the song. He thought of countless primadonnas. Does it have to be Laura Goldberg?

"Instruments don't say words. Can't they convey various emotions with just their sound?"

"Hm. You're thinking of the human voice as just an instrument?"

"Yes."

"But why Laura? There are a lot of great soprano singers out there. I can get anyone for you. No. I'm pretty sure they'll get in line once they hear that it's your song."

Jun Hyuk smiled and scratched his head.

"Famous prima donnas wouldn't be able to withstand it."

“Withstand what?”

Tara had been holding back her words but could not hold her curiosity.

“There are 5 perfect sounds in my head. They’ll have to sing countless times until that sound comes out. People who are already stars wouldn’t be able to take it and I’m pretty sure they would get angry. Oh and that doesn’t mean I’m underestimating Laura’s abilities. She’ll be able to handle it.”

Laura has not sung very much yet. Her unique sound will become more firm as she spends more time as a singer. It will be hard to bring out the sounds that Jun Hyuk wants if her sound becomes set in completely.

“The sound can’t change even slightly. E with the same pronunciation has a fortis, an ordinary sound, and heavy sound. There are also sounds pronounced in between E and O, and E and I.”

“She can’t stray even a bit... Hm.”

“It’s extremely experimental.”

Yoon Kwang Hun smiled at Jun Hyuk’s idea. It is the kind of music he correlates with Jun Hyuk. He has the ability to go beyond a simple song with a beautiful melody, to be pioneering and create innovatory music.

“That is why I made the melody beautiful. I was actually going to make the melody irregular too... but then people won’t listen to it.”

Isaac was more surprised by what Jun Hyuk just said than he was by the music. A lot of contemporary music is not created with the public’s tastes taken into consideration. It was always more important to show the composer’s intent, philosophy, and thinking. As a result, a lot of music that is not much more than noise was produced.

It could be that they intentionally rejected beautiful melodies. Beautiful melodies pose the danger of bringing out emotions that the composer had not intended to evoke.

But what Jun Hyuk was saying meant that he would create music that would sell to the public no matter how experimental it is. It is unbelievable that this is the Jun Hyuk who wrote the extreme Inferno.

“So Isaac, try contacting Laura. You have to put in the contract that she’ll have to pay a tremendous amount of penalties if she quits in the middle... Stuff like that so she can’t get out of it. He he.”

“Are you thinking of releasing an album too?”

“Yes. Laura won’t be motivated either if we’re just experimenting. We’ll release an album and perform... It won’t be a bad deal for Laura either because the performance will just be one soprano since there isn’t an accompaniment.”

As soon as Jun Hyuk was done speaking, President Stern looked for his satellite phone. He needs to take Laura Goldberg out before the tour for the Queen Elisabeth Competition finalists begins. While he was calling various people, the private plane flew through the Atlantic clouds of success to New York.

Chapter 207

“Hey. Isn’t this a waste of space? The apartment is too big.”

Yoon Kwang Hun yelled as soon as they opened the door to Jun Hyuk’s New York apartment. Even the apartment he lived in when he was at his peak was just a small one-bedroom compared to this place.

“That’s what I think too. President Stern brings a ton of people to throw a party sometimes. There’s nothing we can do.”

“Parties? What parties? Are they like the parties we see in movies?”

Yoon Kwang Hun gulped as his eyes trembled.

“You just imagined something weird, didn’t you? Playboy cover girls... Huh? Ke ke.”

“It’s not?”

“This isn’t Hollywood. A lot of women do come, but they aren’t models. Most of them are industry people.”

“Really?”

Jun Hyuk pushed a Yoon Kwang Hun full of disappointment into an empty room.

“First, rest. We have to go out for dinner. We might be meeting Maestro Dimitri Carras of the New York Philharmonic.”

“Right. I’ll have to take comfort in that.”

Yoon Kwang Hun threw his bag on the ground and was about to go to sleep when his phone rang.

“Mr. Stern.”

– Mr. Yoon. I didn’t intrude when you were about to rest, did I?

“Oh, no. It’s alright.”

– Then will you contact Korea for me? If there’s a paper or station that wants to interview Jun Hyuk, tell them to call us at Stern Corporation. I’ll text you the contact information for the manager. And we’re thinking of holding the interview in about a week.

“Alright. I’ll tell Jun that as well.”

Yoon Kwang Hun hung up the phone and remembered what Jun Hyuk had said. Though he is over 70 years old, he is a lively old man who never rests.



“Ugh fuck. Are you guys crazy! I can’t believe this.”

K broadcast newsroom culture reporter Kim Jong Man looked at his mail and cursed.

“Hey. What is it that you’re cursing this early in the morning?”

“Manager Park, I got an e-mail from Jang Jun Hyuk’s management agency. I’m speechless.”

“What? You got an e-mail? What did they say? When will he do the interview?”

Manager Park ran to reporter Kim Jong Man’s desk to read the e-mail on his monitor.

“The date is a week later. Apparently, they’re holding a joint press conference at the Hudson Hotel in New York. They’re only taking the Korean press by broadcast.”

Manager Park did not finish reading the e-mail and tapped the back of Kim Jong Man’s head.

“Hey! Are you joking? What joint press conference? I told you to go get an exclusive.”

“Listen to the rest. The joint press conference is 20 minutes. Pictures are allowed. Recording is also allowed. They said no recording with a camera.”

Reporter Kim Jong Man rubbed the back of his head and talked about the rest of the e-mail.

“Then what about the exclusive interview? There isn’t one?”

“There is. The presidential suite of the Hudson Hotel. Camera recording is okay and 40 minutes. No questions about when he used to wander as a orphan. The interviewer needs to be someone who knows classical well.”

“Then it’s done. What’s the problem?”

“They’re telling us to pay for the exclusive interview. \$20,000.”

“What? \$20,000?”

“Hm... How many stations do you think there are that want to record an interview with Jun Hyuk?”

Manager Park was surprised at the \$20,000 amount for a moment, but he immediately started thinking about the competitors.

“3 national broadcasting stations. The small cable channels won’t be trying to spend money to get an interview when they barely have any money... The big 3 cable channels. There will be about 6.”

One of the culture news reporters counted them off on his fingers.

“Hey. Send a response. \$150,000 for 1 hour. Ask for an exclusive for our station.”

“What? Sir! \$150,000?”

“You talk too much. Just do as I say.”

Reporter Kim Jong Man needed to rub the back of his head again.

“Why would Jun Hyuk do an interview for free? To promote his performance with the New York Philharmonic? How many people in Korea do you think will go to see him conduct?”

Manager Park spoke to all of the reporters.

“You don’t know that Hollywood stars get paid when they’re not promoting movies?”

“But isn’t it still a bit too much?”

Reporter Kim Jong Man was still complaining and murmured carefully just in case Manager Park’s hand came flying again.

“Too much? This guy here is too uptight.”

“What? Sir, what does that mean...”

“Why? Are you jealous that he does an hour-long interview and gets paid over \$100,000? Why does how much he makes get you angry? It’s the company’s money. How much do you think we’ll make after paying \$150,000? They’re saying he’s the 21st century Beethoven! It’s an exclusive interview with Beethoven. There are going to be tons of advertisements. Think about it.”

Manager Park yelled at the culture news reporters again.

“You guys listen up too. Unless otherwise indicated, you’re all dead if you say anything bad about Jang Jun Hyuk. You know how the nation is feeling about him right now, right? He’s the first kid to be treated as a hero since skater Kim Yu Na. If you leave any marks on him, we’ll be ground to dust. Keep that in mind.”

Kim Jong Man needed to hide his sulking and write the e-mail again, and Manager Park ran to the department office to get approval for spending.



“Hey! Are you crazy? \$150,000? You asshole. My salary is only half of that. You want to use all of that in 1 hour? You’re going crazy.”

As soon as Manager Park said the dollar amount, the culture newsroom Director started out by cursing at him. It is a relief that he did not throw anything at him.

“Sir, trust me. I’m telling you this is jackpot.”

“Who doesn’t know that? But \$150,000 is too much.”

“Producing a 1-hour drama costs a minimum of \$400,000. Do you know how much the fee for an MC of a variety program is? Jun Hyuk is the 21st century Beethoven. And it’s

an exclusive interview for 1 hour.”

Manager Park insisted that \$150,000 is not that much money by comparing it to the fees of other big shows.

“Are we a drama program? The entertainment station? This is the newsroom. The culture news on top of that. You say something like that when you know how much our cover fees are?”

The Director was about to chase Manager Park out.

“Don’t talk nonsense, and get 40 minutes for \$20,000. I’m giving you that \$20,000 after a lot of thought too.”

“No. I’m saying we should hand this over to the entertainment station.”

“What? Entertainment?”

“Yes. The entertainment station has a big budget, so they can handle \$150,000. Can’t we just use their material? Press time will only be 2 or 3 minutes at most anyway.”

There is likelihood if it is the entertainment station. The Director’s voice came down a few notches.

“I thought you said no entertainment? No tearful hardship stories, no gossip news. I thought you only have to talk about music? Are you going to do an entertainment segment with a documentary on classical music?”

He did not mention it, but the Director had another concern. He wondered if the entertainment station has an MC who could handle a the depth of an interview with a composer who tossed Beethoven a challenge and succeeded, and is a maestro conducting for the New York Philharmonic.

But Manager Park already looked confident.

“There is a suitable MC. He can easily talk about music alone for an hour and he’s entertaining. Lastly, we have the best weapon. He’s close with Jang Jun Hyuk.”

“What? Close? Does Jang Jun Hyuk have close people in Korea... Oh...”

“He he. What do you think? Isn’t someone like Yoon Jung Su great?”

The culture Director threw the pen he was holding.

“Hey. You should have said that in the first place. Hurry up and get Yoon Jung Su on board before someone else gets him. I’ll contact the entertainment station.”

Yoon Jung Su is plenty. The 1-hour interview could be used in different segments: entertainment, newsroom, and even cultural education. \$150,000 was starting to look smaller.



Yoon Kwang Hun prepared a New York Philharmonic CD to get Dimitri Carras’ signature, and was excited to attend dinner.

He became silent after getting a signature and picture, while President Stern and Maestro Carras discussed their schedule.

“The New York Philharmonic committee wants 2 performances. Once in Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center’s private concert hall, and once outside in Damrosch Park.”

“I was going to do both performances outside if it weren’t for the album recording since the capacity is almost doubled.”

Damrosch Park is one of Lincoln Center’s venues, and is 2.4 acre outdoor theater. It is the main stage of New York Fashion Week, that opens twice a year, and the place of the Midsummer Night Swing Festival (June 27 – July 16) with dancing and music.

Maestro Carras was looking at a calendar in his pocket book and checking dates.

“Jun, how many days do you think rehearsals will take? The choral symphony won’t be hard to get together because it’s a regular in the New York Philharmonic’s repertoire.”

“Well it’s the New York Philharmonic. Won’t 1 week be enough?”

“Right? I already started rehearsals once I received your score. We should be able to put it on stage after 2 weeks. Since Danny the violinist already performed, there won’t

be any problems there.”

President Stern was reluctant after hearing that the performance would be ready after 1 month.

“But we won’t be able to hold the performance until 2 months pass since there are issues of promotions and album recording. We haven’t even decided on a record label yet.”

“There’s no harm in having plenty of time. Isaac, you and the committee can take care of that issue.”

Dimitri Carras looked at Jun Hyuk again and became serious.

“Everything else is okay, but I haven’t heard your response yet. What do you think? You have no intention of playing the piano?”

“Oh. Is there really a need for me to play the piano? Aren’t there a lot of amazing pianists? They would come swarming with just a phone call from you.”

Jun Hyuk was still dawdling, but Dimitri Carras had been set on him as a pianist for a long time now. Unless there is an unavoidable circumstance such as if he broke his finger, he wants to put Jun Hyuk on stage no matter what.

Beethoven played the piano while he conducted... He did not want to miss out on listening to the composer’s piano.

“Why are you turning it down? I want to perform with the composer’s piano. It’s not like you can’t play the piano or anything. Is there a reason to keep that incredible talent hidden?”

“I’m not hiding it. I just want to hear how you interpret it. I’m scared that if I play, there’ll be a different color to it.”

“Your thinking is opposite to mine. I want to perform with a piano and violin on equal footing. I want to hold a performance that is lively and rough.”

Dimitri Carras showed a lot of confidence. The soloists’ and conductor’s interpretation might be different, but he trusts that the New York Philharmonic will be capable of a great ensemble.

“Then shall we try it out? We have a full 2 months to do it.”

Jun Hyuk’s consent is more welcome to Yoon Kwang Hun than it is to anyone else. He cannot even remember when he last heard him play. And this is a concert with the New York Philharmonic.

“Oh! We get to see Jun as a pianist in Avery Fisher Hall? I’m really anticipating it.”

“Isaac. And Maestro Carras. You can’t say that the performance was ruined because of me. Ha ha.”

Isaac Stern recalled when he first met Jun Hyuk. He had played the piano for Laura Goldberg to sing to at Clayton-Hoffman School of Music’s support association.

A piano that erased himself and highlighted the singing. As soon as Isaac Stern heard that piano, he no longer heard the singing. Once he looked into Jun Hyuk later, he kept hearing that he is a genius composer.

However, Jun Hyuk remains an excellent pianist in Isaac Stern’s mind.

Chapter 208

The morning after arriving in New York, Tara came to the apartment.

“Jun, you’ll be pretty busy all morning. We need to start working on preparing promotions.”

“Whew. I trust that you scheduled the least you could.”

“Not the least, but in moderation. Excluding Brussels since it’s a competition, this can be called your debut performance, right? We need to start it in the grandest manner possible and end successfully.”

Jun Hyuk fully understood the management agency’s role until now. The most important thing is to trust each other. All he needs to do is trust Tara and President Stern, and go with them in the direction they lead him.

“What do I need to do?”

“One day for shooting the poster. Clips to insert into a promotional video and the remaining interview. The last interview is with the Korean press.”

Tara stuck a print out of the week’s schedule on the refrigerator so that Jun Hyuk could check it whenever he wanted to.

The photographer in charge of the poster shoot and director taking over the promotional video smiled brightly as soon as they saw Jun Hyuk. They kept saying ‘good’ even as they were in the midst of shooting.

Most conductors are past middle-aged, so they cannot get full shots. It is always hard work because they need to find the angles where they will not shoot their bulging bellies.

Jun Hyuk on the other hand, is optimal for shooting a poster with his tall height and lean body. They were able to finish up easily because they could keep shooting without considering the angles too much.

As America is the magazine heaven, there was a tremendous amount of magazines and media lined up for interviews.

There were the usual magazines with expertise in classical music like Gramophone, The Classic, Symphone, BBC Music, but also those in various genres like pop music like Guitar World, Billboard, Rolling Stones, Jazz Time. There were also the inevitable press like the New York Times.

Fortunately, all of the questions were regarding music and anything beyond that was only about his girlfriend Amelia.

The questions he received most were about his statement on Beethoven and his interpretation of the choral concerto. Rather than compare himself to Beethoven, he made the reporters speechless by delving deeply into Beethoven's music.

He pointed out the sounds of each instrument in the melody of a certain verse of a particular opus and part, so the reporters did not have the ability to refute or add to this with questions. This depth of conversation is only possible with another conductor.

Interviews with pop music magazines were much easier and more comfortable. They did not care about his statement on Beethoven. Their greatest interest was in his plans in the realm of jazz, rock, and the blues.

There are a lot of fans waiting for Jun Hyuk who had released one jazz album and one heavy metal album before going over to the world of classical.



Yoon Kwang Hun woke up early every morning and ran a lap around the park. He carried out his daily routine, recalling his former life in America.

Once he took a shower and had a light breakfast, he disappeared. Jun Hyuk thought he was touring the city, but knew that could not be right because he had lived in America for a long time.

“But sir, where do you go everyday?”

“Huh? I didn’t tell you? Lincoln Center.”

“Lincoln Center? Why?”

“To watch the rehearsals. New York Philharmonic, New York Pops Orchestra, Opera House. I watch their rehearsals in turn everyday.”

“What? Is that because Maestro Carras said you could go anytime? You have to stop after going once or twice. How could you go everyday?”

“Hey hey! I’m not that much of a wretch. I’m going as someone with a premium membership.”

Yoon Kwang Hun saw that Jun Hyuk was surprised, and waved his hand to tell him not to worry.

“If it’s the premium membership, you’d have to pay quite a lot of money.”

“I was a gold member when I was living in America a long time ago. My records were still there, so they renewed that for me. I didn’t pay as much as I did back then of course, but they made me a premium member even though I gave a little.”

Most symphony orchestras including Korea’s Seoul Philharmonic provide more services with membership support registration.

General members are those who have purchased for the regular performance season. Season passes are discounted by as much as 50%. Premium members are those who have paid more than the amount for the regular performance season in donations.

Premium members have the privilege of going to rehearsals whenever they want to. They can watch from afar in the empty seats or watch from outside the room. Higher members are able to go backstage.

“Do you know what privilege the person who pays the most for the New York Philharmonic gets?”

“Privilege? There are things like that?”

“Yeah. You’re going to be amazed when you hear.”

“What is it?”

Yoon Kwang Hun looked at Jun, who was full of curiosity, and looked as if he were telling a secret.

“If it’s the New York Philharmonic, you have to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to become the top member. That member... goes on stage for the winter concert.”

“Huh? Is that true? Does that person watch the performance on stage?”

“No. If it’s the winter concert, of course it’s Beethoven’s choral symphony.”

“Yes. Most are.”

“That person becomes someone playing an instrument.”

“No way. How can a normal person perform?”

What kinds of people are the orchestra members? They are professionals who would receive hundreds of dollars per hour of lessons. There is no way that someone would be allowed to stand among these people just by paying a lot of money.

“No. The person really does go on stage with an instrument. It’s the triangle.”

The triangle is a very important instrument in the 4th part of the choral symphony. It blends in with the piccolo and that soft sound is superb. It is also an instrument that someone can handle as a runner with enough practice.

“That’s unbelievable.”

“He he. Of course not just anyone does it. They put the sponsor among the top class that they want, on stage.”

“Do you want to try it too?”

“No. I don’t think I could do it. I might die of a heart attack.”

Yoon Kwang Hun is waving his hand, but his expression showed that he was already imagining himself holding the triangle.



“The Korean press and broadcast interview has been decided. 20 minutes joint conference. An exclusive interview for 1 hour.”

“1 hour? What do I do for an hour?”

If there are 3 broadcasts, it is a total of 3 hours. Jun Hyuk’s head hurt.

“Don’t worry. Instead, it’s just 1 place. There will only be questions on music. There will be bits and pieces of what happened in Salzburg and Brussels, but do it comfortably because there won’t be awkward questions.”

The cumbersome is over after this interview tomorrow. Laura Goldberg, who is still in Brussels for gala concerts, will be coming back to New York after 2 or 3 days.

There is 1 month until rehearsals with the New York Philharmonic start. Thinking of the fun he will have writing music during that time, he could not wait to be done with the interview.

“Oh right. Since we don’t know Korean, your lawyer Catherine Lim will also be present. She’ll end it right away if something weird comes up.”

“Then what about you, Tara?”

“Of course I’ll be there too. If there’s anything you need while you’re doing the interview, just tell me. And I was going to ask for the questions in advance, but didn’t. You can just interview confidently as you’ve been doing.”

Watching Jun Hyuk interview, Tara had seen that Jun Hyuk is capable of getting through the questions as long as they are professional. They no longer need to avoid the press.

“But who’s the exclusive interview with?”

“K station.”

Jun Hyuk had been thinking that the exclusive had been with a music magazine, and frowned.

“Tara. There are a lot of cases with Korean broadcasting stations where comedians conduct the interviews.”

“Comedians?”

“Yeah. There are a lot of cases where they aren’t professional and only ask about gossip or overdo it to force laughter.”

“That’s included in the conditions too. The interviewer needs to have knowledge about music. We’ll cut it as soon as it starts looking like a comedy talk show. You don’t have to worry about it.”

While Tara was reassuring Jun Hyuk, the doorbell rang. When she checked the monitor at the entrance and opened the door, lawyer Lim So Mi came in.

“Hey Jun Hyuk. It’s been a while for us, hasn’t it?”

“Mrs. Lim. How have you been?”

Lim So Mi seemed to be surprised with the changes in Jun Hyuk.

“You change drastically every year. You’re conducting the New York Philharmonic now? At this rate, you’ll be a standing conductor by next year. Anyway, you’re really impressive. Really.”

“Maestro Carras is still alive and well. I’m pretty sure he’ll stick around for another 10 years.”

“Oh. Do you have it picked out as your spot in 10 years?”

Lim So Mi laughed as she looked around.

“But how about Mr. Yoon? He’s not here? We only spoke over the phone and haven’t met before.....”

“No. He’s stamping his time card at Lincoln Center.”

“Lincoln Center?”

“Yes. He’s living for the fun of watching orchestra rehearsals.”

Tara was watching them speak for a while in Korean when she spoke up,

“Catherine. Thank you for helping us like this.”

“It’s nothing. This is part of my job too. It’s alright.”

“The interview tomorrow will be conducted in Korean, so we really need for you to be able to react quickly.”

“Looking at the interview on BBC’s homepage, he’s an expert now. I think he’ll do really well. I’ll just translate for you Tara.....”

There is just one thing that the two of them are worried about. Often, there are reporters who throw provocative questions to try to raise emotions and get a scoop. They just have to prevent Jun Hyuk from giving harsh responses.

Chapter 209

The joint conference held in the Hudson Hotel went smoothly. To use the 20 minutes efficiently, the reporters agreed on their questions. They avoided repeating questions and asked insightful questions on music.

There were just 2 unavoidable questions that did not deal with music, and one was something that everyone wondered about – his money, earnings.

“I don’t know. I don’t know how much I’ve made. People I trust are handling it for me.”

After Jun Hyuk’s response, Lim So Mi took the microphone.

“You can just think that his earnings are much smaller than what you all are expecting. You cannot imagine him as a pop star or a Hollywood star. The classical market is small, even in America.”

Tara checked the time and sent the signal to end it. Then, a question that they had not expected or planned beforehand came out.

“Mr. Jang Jun Hyuk, you keep the Korean press at a distance. Is this because of what happened while you were participating in the audition program in the past?”

Lim So Mi was taken aback by the unexpected question, and when she was about to say ‘no comment’ to wrap the interview up, Jun Hyuk took the microphone.

“Yes, that is right. That incident was my first impression of our country’s press, and first impressions are hard to forget. That first impression was one of distrust.”

When Jun Hyuk answered without the slightest hesitation, the reporter who asked became speechless. But, there were reporters who did not lose this opportunity.

“Then, are you thinking of leaving this wall built up?”

“No. I will participate in any interview that involves questions regarding music like today. I intend to reject any interviews that only show interest in basic questions instead of music, even if it’s the American media. The press just needs to respect that

boundary.”

This ended the joint conference. Jun Hyuk left to the hotel guest room for his one-on-one interview.

Lim So Mi told Tara what Jun Hyuk said at the end of his interview, and Tara was relieved because of his clean response.

When they entered the presidential suite, the broadcasting station’s staff was already installing lights and cameras.

“Jun. We’ll start in 30 minutes. Rest until then.”

“Why? They’re not ready yet? I’m okay so let’s just start right away.”

Tara smiled as she looked at Jun Hyuk who had adjusted perfectly for the interview. He will need to handle tighter schedules from now on, and there’s no need to worry at this rate of adjustment.

“Okay. We’ll get ready right away.”

When Jun Hyuk sat on the sofa to wait for the cameras to get set up, the producer in charge and interviewer entered the room.

“Huh? Teacher! What are you doing here?”

Jun Hyuk saw Yoon Jung Su and bolted up. He had met an unexpected person in an unexpected place.

“Wow. You’ve really changed so much you’re unrecognizable. You give off the aura of a maestro.”

Yoon Jung Su was also astonished by the changes in Jun Hyuk.

“Are you doing the interview?”

“It turned out like that. When the call first came in from the station, I rejected it because I thought they were trying to use our relationship. But, it’s been a while since I’ve seen you and it was a pity that we didn’t get to meet up in Japan. And I thought that it might be more comfortable with me if it’s something that’s going to happen

anyway. Is that okay? If you're uncomfortable, we can change. A culture news reporter is waiting just in case."

"No, it's okay. I was surprised because I wasn't expecting it, but I wanted to see you too. It's comfortable. I like it."

The producer approached them while they were catching up.

"Mr. Jun Hyuk. We'll be starting the interview now. Is it okay to continue speaking comfortably like you both have been doing?"

"Yes. It'd be more strange for Teacher Yoon to start speaking formally all of a sudden."

"Thank you. Then, we'll start filming and you should both continue speaking like you've been doing."

Microphones were attached to their clothing, and 2 solo shot cameras and 1 main camera with a full shot started to run.

"Alright. Then, shall we start?"

"Yes."

"When's the performance? Has the date been confirmed?"

"No, not yet. But, we're thinking that it will be in 2 months."

"It still doesn't feel real when I look at you. You're conducting the New York Philharmonic! It's even funny when I think about it now, how I made you do things thinking that I could teach you... If the world finds out that I told Beethoven to try out mixing, they'll be astonished."

"No, I really had fun then. I learned a lot about sound mixing thanks to you too."

The producer liked how Yoon Jung Su started out by reminiscing about their past. Their informal conversation might bring out a better picture than going by a script that the writers put together.

"Let me first ask something I'm personally curious about. Why on earth did you go out on a competition? You can put work on stage whenever you want through your

company. A place like Stern Corporation would be able to get your score in the hands of conductors all around the world.”

“It was because I wanted to conduct. I thought that I might not be able to conduct if I release the song through President Stern... and I wanted to get an evaluation on my work.”

“So? Are you satisfied?”

“Yes, since I am now able to conduct with the New York Philharmonic.”

“Honestly, did you also want to brag? Look! I could even write something like this with my feet. Like this?”

The producer gulped as he watched through the monitor. Getting Yoon Jung Su on was the best move. He must be the only interviewer who could throw such a question as though it is nothing.

“Excuse me? With my feet? Ha ha. Hm... I can’t say that’s totally untrue.”

It is totally expected considering Jun Hyuk’s age. Even Yoon Jung Su in his 40s wants to show off his talent and ability.

Yoon Jung Su saw the producer check the time and turned the cue sheet.

“Your statement on Beethoven. I looked up what you said exactly and you said, ‘within a range to follow him’. But you didn’t say ‘until when’. It seems like this could mean that the final goal is to create a piece comparable to Beethoven’s but also that you could surpass him if you wanted to. What was your true intention?”

“Is this an official question? Or is it personal?”

“Why? What’s the difference?”

“If it’s official, the answer is the same. It needs to be compared through music, but we have to wait because I don’t have enough work to be evaluated on.”

Yoon Jung Su heard Jun Hyuk’s answer and was locked in thought for a moment. And he looked at the producer as he spoke.

“Sorry, but can you turn the camera off for a second?”

“Excuse me?”

“I want to hear the other answer off the record. Producer Park. Aren’t you curious about Jun Hyuk’s real thoughts?”

Producer Park hesitated for a moment before signaling to the camera man. He is also curious about the 21st century Beethoven’s real thoughts.

“Done, right? Tell me honestly.”

“I can make a piece at a similar level at any time right now. But, I have to catch up to become a musician like Beethoven at his position.”

“What’s Beethoven’s position like?”

“Since symphonies can be divided to those before him and those after him.”

“Then what about you? What changes before and after Jang Jun Hyuk? No – what do you want to change?”

“I don’t know. I can’t say exactly what it is. But I want to hear that kind of evaluation one day. That something can be separated to before and after Jang Jun Hyuk. I don’t know what that something is yet.”

Yoon Jung Su is not the only person who is surprised. Lim So Mi and Tara, listening to Lim So Mi’s translation, were also surprised. Tara was able to confirm once again that she had done the right thing in quitting her job with the Boston Symphony and coming to Jun Hyuk.

“Wow. The dimension of your goal alone is different. Even a big footprint on the history of music is a big deal, but you’re saying that you’ll be a backbone of music history.”

The cameras came back on while Yoon Jung Su was admiring him.

“Great, then next question. Between your roles as composer and performer – including conducting – which is the one you like more?”

“Composer. I have yet to experience the bliss I feel with composing while conducting

or performing.”

“Bliss from composing?”

“Yes. I said this in my interview with Gramophone too, but it’s a feeling like my head is going to explode as I think of musical motifs. An entire song rings ‘boom’ all at once. When I thought of the motif of choral concerto, the sounds that would come from 29 instruments for over 1 hour filled my head in 0.0001 seconds and then exploded like fireworks.”

“What?”

It was hard for Yoon Jung Su to understand Jun Hyuk’s words. 1 hour changes into 1 moment? Does this mean that time stops? Or...?

“I can’t even express that bliss. I move that musical motif onto a score. I add anything missing or modify the parts I’m not satisfied with as I move it onto the score. And there’s another bang in my head when the song is complete.”

“You’re saying you hear that long song at once?”

“Yes. I think that’s really the sound of heaven.”

“Well... I don’t even know what to say because I can’t imagine it.”

“You haven’t felt like that before? The song you write becomes compressed and explodes?”

Jun Hyuk looked at Yoon Jung Su with sparkling eyes, but he only showed a bittersweet smile.

“I’m an average person. I don’t have anything like that. I create a framework with a theme melody and work it out from there. It’s a struggle, an extremely ordinary style.”

Yoon Jung Su was frustrated that there was nothing he could empathize with in Jun Hyuk’s words when he is also a composer. And he became lost imagining the sound of heaven.

But, all he could think of, was the sound of a grand fireworks festival.

“That doesn’t happen for me every time either. There are just times when it does feel like that. And there are a lot of times when I make a framework to work off of like you said. Oh right. You have scores you wrote but haven’t revealed, right?”

Yoon Jung Su snapped out of his imagination.

“Yeah. The people who know about them are going crazy because I haven’t released them.”

“Of those, there are a lot that I wrote in the normal way. And there are other songs where I felt bliss from thinking of a motif and completing a score.”

“It’s different. You’re not revealing them because the feeling is different?”

“Not all of them, but there are songs like that. The feeling must have changed because there’s an unnecessary part in there.”

“Then between the normal way and – what is it? – where it goes bang and it explodes, which do you like more?”

“I can’t separate them like that. The regular way is just different. There’s an aria that I’ll be working on in a few days, but I did a lot of calculations while writing that. I like that one a lot too.”

Yoon Jung Su sighed heavily.

“Ha ha. Well. I can’t conduct this interview.”

“Excuse me?”

“An ordinary person like me can’t imagine or understand... I think another genius needs to interview you.”

Yoon Jung Su felt the producer shooting daggers at him and spoke again,

“Oh right. We shouldn’t be like this. We only have an hour.”

“Oh no, it’s alright. I like it because this doesn’t even feel like an interview and it feels like I’m just hanging out with you. Hang on.”

Jun Hyuk spoke to Tara, who was checking the time.

“Tara? Do we have anything scheduled for after this? I want to spend more time here. Is that okay?”

“Jun, wait a second.”

Tara went into the bedroom with the producer in charge and Lim So Mi.

“Mr. Park, let’s do this. Film however you want from now on without a time limit.”

Lim So Mi was surprised, but she translated into Korean. She was also so enwrapped in their conversation that she felt it a pity to end it after an hour.

“What? Really? Well. Thank you.”

The producer was so happy he wanted to jump up and down. An exclusive interview without a time limit. There could be no other jackpot.

“There’s just a condition.”

“Yes, anything.”

“We won’t look at the final edited clip and tell you what to do with it. But, show us everything you filmed and completely delete any parts that we request. You should be able to edit with the rest.”

The producer heard Lim So Mi’s translation and frowned. Claiming editorial rights is inevitable, but censorship?

“It sounds like you want to censor it. Isn’t that too much?”

“Yes. We need to make sure that anything unnecessary is not left recorded. If you call it censorship, I guess it is.”

Tara used the word censorship without hesitation. She is certain that it is not an unreasonable demand to erase the parts they are uncomfortable with when she is making such a great offer.

“If you don’t want to do it, the cameras will go off after exactly 1 hour. They can

continue speaking after the cameras are off if they want to.”

“Then it doesn’t matter how much there is after we erase parts?”

“No. We won’t care whether it goes to 2 or 3 hours. Isn’t this an exceptional offer? If I were you, I wouldn’t even have to think about it.”

It really is an offer that he does not have to think about. The producer thanked Tara and continued the interview.

“Tara. Isn’t it too good? They could just keep speaking personally once the cameras are off.”

“It’s okay, Catherine. They can record Jun interview so happily as much as they want. He looks great when he’s smiling. His likeability is going to go up when Korean viewers see that.”

“Then, you’re thinking of the situation in Korea?”

“Yes. Jun will perform in Korea one day. It’s good to make a lot of fans when he has the chance to.”

Lim So Mi looked at Tara again. Her business mind is extraordinary.

Chapter 210

“Then, to continue, you’re not going to ever release those scores you have bundled up? You’re still writing songs now, right? You’re just going to keep storing them?”

“I’m sure I will one day. He he.”

“What does that laugh mean? And does that ‘one day’ really mean something?”

Yoon Jung Su spoke while examining Jun Hyuk, who kept smiling.

“Those songs aren’t that bad, though some of the early ones are cheesy. To say it simply, they’re on reserve.”

“What? Reserve?”

“Yes. When it becomes hard to write songs and I can’t think of motifs... They’re just on reserve so I can reveal them one by one if I lose inspiration.”

“I don’t think that’s it. That just means you’re never going to reveal them.”

It just sounds like a joke. Music matures with time. He could lose inspiration, but music is not written only when motifs come to them. As they create music, there are more instances when they start to think up motifs.

“You never know. It might just disappear one day.”

“Don’t worry because that’s not going to happen. Isn’t it better to go through them one by one and release them, except for the ones you really don’t like?”

They did not realize that the time was passing by because they were talking intensely about music. After 3 hours flew by, Jun Hyuk sent the signal to end it.

“Teacher, I’m starting to get hungry. Let’s eat together. We can talk while we eat.....”

“Oh. It went on for too long, didn’t it? Let’s do that. Then, last question: your personal goals? I’m going to do this no matter what. Something like that.”

Yoon Jung Su posed the last question with the producer's signal that the interview was over.

"Mozart left the world over 600 songs as he died at the age of 36, but I'll live at least twice that long, right? Then I guess my goal is to leave over 1000 songs?"

"1000 songs?"

"Yes. If I keep going as I'm doing now, I think it's a goal I can meet."

"All classical?"

"Hm. I didn't really decide on that. Just as it happens."

"Speaking as a fan of yours, I hope you become a great musician, who crosses through different genres."

The interview ended with Yoon Jung Su's meaningful hopes for Jun Hyuk, and Tara approached them.

"Jun. The car is waiting, so go first in that. I just made a reservation, so the driver will take you to the restaurant. Mr. Yoon is going to head there too, so eat with everyone."

"Why? You're not coming?"

"I still have work to do here. I'll call you as soon as I'm done, so don't mind me."

Tara and Lim So Mi need to go through the entire interview footage. Jun Hyuk and Yoon Jung Su left the guest room.

"Teacher, let's go. We can talk as we eat."

"It's been a while since I've seen Mr. Yoon too. We both live in Korea but meeting in New York."

"Oh right. When do you go back?"

"Tomorrow evening. I have plenty of time."

Jun Hyuk enjoyed his dinner with a carefree heart, now that he was done with his last

interview. He is happy that he can concentrate on music again now that the cumbersome work is over.



Laura Goldberg never thought she would have to sing an aria with just one sound.

She had been more excited when she heard that Jun Hyuk had written the song while thinking of her. He is a star and she will be the first person to sing his song. This alone will catch the world's attention.

The mail with the score included said that they would start recording as soon as she arrived in New York, so she should be fully prepared.

Laura had not imagined that she would record her first album so soon. She learned the music sheet that President Stern sent her and just waited for the gala concert to hurry up and end.

When Laura arrived in New York, she forgot her jetlag and exhaustion and ran to the recording studio. Only two people were waiting for her in the recording studio, a sound engineer and Jun Hyuk.

"Did the gala concert go well?"

"Honestly, I was out of it once I got the score. I was paying more attention to this song than I was to the concert. And thanks."

Laura thanked him for choosing her, but Jun Hyuk shook his head.

"Push that back until after the recording. If I don't think you're up for it, I'm going to get another soprano."

Jun Hyuk cut it off coldly and Laura sobered. There is no need to say thank you. Jun Hyuk is the composer and he will be directing her. Her job is to hurry up and end the recording to his standards.

They have not gathered in this studio because of recognition or friendship. They have come to work.

“Okay. I’ll bring out a result that you’ll be satisfied with, Mr. Producer.”

Jun Hyuk smiled when he heard Laura sound ready to get work done.

“Great. Then, do you want to try singing it easily? Let’s see what you practiced over a week first.”

Laura went into the recording booth, put the score on the stand, and cleared her throat.

“Laura. Since there isn’t an accompaniment, pay attention to the beat. Do you need a metronome?”

“No. I’ll try it out without a metronome first.”

“Okay. Go.”

Her voice came out through the recording booth microphone and wrapped the whole studio. Jun Hyuk wrote something on a piece of paper while she sang.

Laura sang 5 five-minute songs without resting and looked at Jun Hyuk.

“Laura, what did you do for a week?”

“Huh? Why? Is it that bad?”

“Your pronunciation is completely off in the passage (part of a melody where the notes are quickly changed in direction to go high or low). I’m sure you saw the one message written on the score. The pronunciation needs to be precise. You didn’t see it?”

“That... that.”

“I have a lot to say about other things, but there’s no need to say it because you can’t do the most basic part.”

Laura was speechless in the recording booth.

“Laura, let me ask one thing.”

“...Yeah.”

“This song. You don’t like it? It’s bad?”

“No. It’s really good. The melody is really beautiful.”

“Then, I haven’t done anything wrong?”

“R... Right.”

“If the song is good, it’s okay if the performance is a little off. Contrary to that, if the performance is good, it’s okay for the song to be plain. But, there isn’t a crazy record label willing to make an album just because it’s okay.”

Jun Hyuk ignored Laura who could not lift her head, and spoke to the sound engineer.

“Will you make what we just recorded into a CD?”

“Excuse me? Oh... Sure.”

The sound engineer was completely lost in Laura’s hair-raisingly beautiful voice and exquisite technique. He could not understand what the producer was so upset about. This is at a perfect standard for a first take.

“Laura, come out.”

Laura came out and Jun Hyuk gave her a sheet of paper.

“These are the places where your pronunciation is off while you sing. Take the CD and check it. We’ll just say that you weren’t in good condition today. If it’s like this tomorrow, it might be hard to keep going.”

The sheet that Jun Hyuk gave her is full of numbers indicating minutes and seconds like a stopwatch.

“And there are a lot of cases where you have to go straight to the concert hall after getting off a plane because your tour schedule is tight. Being off condition because of long flights... I’m sure you know that this kind of excuse doesn’t work in the professional world.”

Laura gently bit her lip. This was not a place to come running to out of excitement. She needed to have come with complete preparation.

Laura looked up at Jun Hyuk and spoke,

“3 days.”

“Huh? What?”

“Let’s meet after 3 days. I can’t get ready in 1 day.”

Jun Hyuk’s face relaxed,

“3 days is enough? Do you want more?”

“No. I need to do it within 3 days. I can’t just keep you waiting.”

Jun Hyuk smiled widely,

“Great. Then 2 in the afternoon in 3 days. Okay?”

Jun Hyuk sent Laura away and then listened to her song again.

“Maestro. I don’t really know what you’re trying to do with this song, but isn’t it pretty great for a first take?”

The sound engineer spoke up cautiously after listening to the recording with Jun Hyuk.

“It is great. This kind of unique sound is rare.”

“But you were really pushing her.....”

“You’ll realize when we’re finishing up with our recording. You’ll know what this sound really looks like.”

The sound engineer was still puzzled at Jun Hyuk’s words.

Chapter 211

Laura's professor concentrated on the music with headphones on and could not speak for a while. She had already received the score while Laura was participating in the gala concert. This will become the ultimate coloratura if Laura's voice is added to this beautiful melody, even if there is no accompaniment.

And, her expectation had not been wrong. The 5 songs she listened to just now, shows the zenith of coloratura.

"He said your pronunciation is shaky?"

"Yes. That note is where he wrote each place where it's shaky."

"I can't even make out half of this with my ears."

Laura looked at her professor's blank stare and could only laugh.

"There's nothing to do about it. Fix what you can make out for me."

"No matter how good his ear is, even notes that are hard for people who spent their lives with music can't discern?"

"We can only trust Jun's directing."

"You said you're meeting him again in 3 days? Then, let's adjust the parts that I can do."

Laura looked at the score and began bringing out a simple yet beautiful sound.

"Laura, wait. What you just did is worse than your recording. Don't just pay attention to the pronunciation. If Jun were only asking for precise pronunciation, wouldn't he just use a machine? Save the zest that brings change to the sounds."

While Laura spent each day in basic vocal hard training, Danny was finishing up the gala concert in Brussels and returning to New York.

He knows that rehearsals start in a month, but he is coming back to practice in order to work toward a perfect performance. He already discussed the direction of the performance in a meeting with Maestro Carras.

“Danny, just stay at my apartment. There’s no reason to stay at a hotel when there are so many empty rooms.”

“No. I can’t be such a nuisance. It’s okay.”

As soon as Jun Hyuk met up with Danny, he told him to come out of the hotel.

“Then what about practicing? You’ll get kicked out of the hotel if you practice there every night because you’re being noisy.”

“I’m going to get a studio to practice in.”

“Then practice at my apartment. It’s made up like a studio, so you can even record. And work on producing music with me.”

“Producing music? What is it? You wrote a new song?”

“Yeah. Soprano aria.”

“Aria? Laura Goldberg?”

“Yeah. How did you know?”

“You kept praising Laura. You don’t just pass by people like that.”

If there is someone who gave him musical inspiration, he always write a song that fits them. Danny regrets that Jun Hyuk has not yet written a song for him. This means that his playing is still ordinary to Jun Hyuk.

“Did I do that? Anyway, I’m going to try testing out that song. Oh right. What’s the violin you’re using right now?”

“Guarneri del Gesu.”

“What? Guarneri?”

Guarneri del Gesu refers to Italian instrument manufacturer, Guarneri family's 3rd manufacturer, Bartholomew Giuseppe Guarneri. 'del Gesu' is his nickname because he carved crosses on the backs of the instruments he made. It is one of the top 3 violins in the world, along with Stradivarius and Amati.

If the Stradivarius is delicately carved and polished to be exemplary and like a woman's voice, the Guarneri has the rough look of wood and a masculine tone. It is also famous for the distinctive sounds it makes by instrument.

However, there are also aspects they have in common; they are instruments of high value.

Danny waved his hand when he saw Jun Hyuk's surprised face,

"Oh, it's not mine. I received sponsorship because I won the Queen Elisabeth Competition and was a finalist in the Chaikovsky Competition."

"Sponsorship?"

"Yeah. Canadian government lent it to me for free for 1 year. I'm using it well right now because there's insurance on it too."

"You're going to go back and forth between the hotel and studio with that expensive instrument? You know that New York's streets are no joke. It's fine, so come into the apartment. Let me see it. I want to see what brings in hundreds of thousands of dollars."

Danny was so grateful for Jun Hyuk's concern that he could cry. He does not yet have the income to stay in a first class hotel without worrying about the costs. It is not an easy ordeal to go back and forth between the studio and hotel either.

"Thanks, Jun. Then, I'll impose on you a bit."

"Impose nothing. I'm not just saying it. There really is something I'm working on. I need the sound of a Guarneri too."

Jun Hyuk seemed to be full of anticipation for the sound of the luxury violin.



“Mr. Yoon. I hope I’m not being a bother.”

“Nonsense. I’m just camping out for a bit too. Don’t mind me.”

Yoon Kwang Hun is meeting a friend of Jun Hyuk’s for the first time. Even though it has only been a few hours since they met, he is fascinated by the fact that the 2 boys are friends.

Bright and cheerful Danny kept chatting, and brought happiness to his surroundings. As for Jun Hyuk, who does not like noise, must have let Danny stay with him because he is really fond of him.

They may like each other because they have completely opposite natures.

“Sir. This is the Guarneri del Gesu violin that goes for over 1.5 million.”

“What? Guarneri? What? Is he from a rich family?”

“Oh. No, Mr. Yoon. It’s sponsored by the Canadian government. A 1 year lease.”

“Oh, I see. So the Canadian government invested in a rising star?”

“I guess you can say it like that? Ha ha.”

Danny laughed humorously.

“Then, shall we hear it? Let’s see what kind of sound comes from something worth 1.5 million.”

Jun Hyuk gave him the score for Laura’s aria.

“Danny, try playing this. It’s a song without accompaniment, so it’ll go well with a violin solo too.”

Danny looked over the score for a moment and held up his violin. After playing the 5 songs consecutively, Danny stuck out his tongue and put the violin down.

“Jun, this is the song a soprano needs to sing? The singer’s going to die of short breath trying to sing this.”

“It is good as a solo song. Playing skills are important because there are a lot of changes... Danny, you truly are good enough to win a competition. Your technique is academic but rough. It’s amazing.”

Danny flushed at Yoon Kwang Hun’s praises. The person with the privilege to be the first to see Jun Hyuk’s scores. He heard that this man has a sharper ear than most critics.

It felt like his praise was instead of Jun Hyuk’s praise.

“Jun, you said this song doesn’t have an accompaniment?”

“Yeah.”

“Then, it can be played on any instrument as long as the register is matched up?”

Danny was already enwrapped in the melody’s beauty.

“It is, but didn’t you just say that she’ll run out of breath?”

“Yeah.”

“It needs to be done by a performer who can express that feeling of running out of breath.”

Danny’s eyes sparkled as he looked at Jun Hyuk. He was curious as to whether or not he was included among those performers.

“Of course, Danny, you expressed that well.”

“Then are you going to give this song to me?”

Jun Hyuk laughed at Danny’s delight.

“There’s nothing to give. I’m going to release the score as soon as Laura’s done recording. Anyone will be able to play it.”

“Oh, really? What a pity.”

The person who plays this first could become the song’s owner. If Danny performs or

releases an album with these 5 songs, any violinist who plays it, is only a second owner unless they give a particularly splendid performance.

Danny is regretful because, once Jun Hyuk releases the score, the world's top violinists will fight to release albums. Jun Hyuk yelled at Danny because these concerns came first,

"You prepare for the concert! Don't think about other things. How many days has it been since you said that you would change your career with the New York performance?"

Chapter 212

When Laura went into the recording booth and sang 'A,' Jun Hyuk got lost intensely in thought. Laura thought of her shortcomings and waited for Jun Hyuk to say something.

He contemplated for a while and spoke to her as though he suddenly remembered something,

"Laura, shall we take a 10 minute break? Have a cup of coffee or something."

Laura left the booth to drink coffee, and Jun Hyuk spoke to the sound engineer quietly,

"Did you hear the part where her pronunciation was shaky?"

As soon as Jun Hyuk spoke, the sound engineer sighed.

"Whew. Maestro, try listening to this."

The sound engineer looked through a folder on the hard drive and opened up several files on the screen.

"This sound library is the file we use as a standard when we need precise pronunciation. There are recordings from vocalists and some from vocal guides. Languages are separated by series, so let's talk after listening to all of them."

Since it is America, a showroom of different races and people, there is a wide variety of 'A' pronunciations. Even those who speak English perfectly, show subtle differences in pronunciation by lineage.

Jun Hyuk listened to all of the files, took off the headphones, and the sound engineer spoke,

"Laura's pronunciation just now was almost perfect. I honestly think it's phenomenal that she changed so much over just 3 days. Even if it doesn't sound precise in Maestro's ears, the public won't be able to tell the difference. I would even bet on it."

"But, there is a difference in the music if it comes to the standard that I want it at. The

overall feeling changes.”

“Yes, Maestro. I understood that completely since I can’t believe the difference between 3 days. It’s just that I hadn’t imagined that precise and consistent pronunciation would make such a great difference.”

The sound engineer saw that Jun Hyuk’s expression remained the same and stressed again,

“Take a look at the wave file. There’s almost no difference with the guide sound. Don’t you think it’s meaningless work beyond this?”

Laura had been watching with a coffee in each of her hands, and gently interrupted,

“Uh, Jun. How close is my singing just now to the goal you have in mind?”

“35%.”

“What?”

“35%?”

The two people cried out at the same time and were speechless.

“Don’t be so surprised, Laura. I lowered my goal for exact pronunciation. You just have to get to 70%. I heard this song on the violin yesterday, and it was hard even for an instrument to maintain the same sound. 35% is in relation to the whole thing, including the technique to change tone and expression.”

Laura’s expression relaxed after she heard Jun Hyuk’s explanation. This is only the 2nd recording. If she has accomplished half from the beginning, she will be able to follow the rest.

“Laura, you’re doing well right now. Honestly, I’m also confused as to where to draw my standards. I’m going to decide after listening to you sing some more, so it’s not to the point where you have to worry. Then, shall we try it again?”

Laura went back into the recording booth with a much brighter face. Jun Hyuk listened to her singing and changed the standard value of the pronunciation he first thought of, little by little.

He directed with the thought that in the worst case scenario, he would release the score alone. If he releases the score and vocalists put the song in their repertoires, he would be able to decide on the standard then.

But Jun Hyuk could not shake the feeling of regret. He wanted to be able to hear the bliss of a coloratura that comes from perfect pronunciation with his ears, instead of just in his head.



One month passed with Danny focused on practicing for his choral concerto performance in Jun Hyuk's apartment, while Laura was waiting in the studio in anxiety like a student who had just finished taking a test and was now waiting for the results.

Jun Hyuk, President Stern, her professor, agent, and record label executives were gathered in the studio and listening to her recording.

There was not a moment when everyone except Jun Hyuk and Laura were not trembling while listening to the song flowing through the magnificent speakers. To put it in terms of pop music, it was like listening to an album full of songs that are 1st on the Billboard chart.

When music stopped coming from the speakers, Jun Hyuk stood up from his seat and spoke,

"I believe that up to here is the best. No matter how much we work on it, it won't get better. Oh right. We did not use machines to work on the calibration."

Up to here?

Better?

Everyone looked at Jun Hyuk in disbelief.

It was singing that had the essence of Italian opera aria, Bel Canto. And with just one sound! Their fingertips are still trembling from the dramatic tension that dominated all 5 songs.

A fresh and beautiful melody, unbelievable tune, frequent changes in a dynamic beat,

a rhythm that increases tension, and even a mysterious melisma (a group of notes sung to one syllable of text).

They had goosebumps the entire time they were listening because of Laura Goldberg's incredible singing that could handle a song containing all of the essences of arias so wonderfully.

Because each of the 5 songs had its own character, there was no way to rank them. One song brought out the listener's compassion and there was another where the part that repeated legato (smooth, flowing manner, without breaks between notes) and staccato (each sound or note sharply separated from the others) fluctuated to the point of breathlessness.

This song seemed to show the complete abilities of vocalists with a lot of pitch intervals, treble, and scales. There was nothing left to say about it.

But, the composer himself sounds as though he feels something is lacking.

"Maestro Jun. Why does it sound like there's a nuance that there's something falling short?"

"It seems that Maestro is also satisfied since the recording has already been completed."

The record label executives seem to have already made their decisions. Their expressions while listening to Laura's song looked as though they were ready to hand a contract over immediately.

They want to release the album no matter what, despite Jun Hyuk's negative expressions.

"Alright. Let's do this."

President Stern did not need to hear any more. Since the record labels seem to have decided already, all that is left is what the two parties are thinking.

"Laura, you can decide on matters of releasing an album. Jun is going to release the scores for these songs. That means anyone can release an album and use it as part of their repertoire in their concerts. If you want to release an album in your name, there are record labels that would completely welcome that as you can see."

Everyone in the studio looked at Laura. She could not forget the last thing that Jun Hyuk said.

She does not know what final shape Jun Hyuk has in mind, but this means that no one can reach it. This is not just applicable to herself, but to everyone.

Jun Hyuk spoke to Laura, who could not quickly make up her mind because of various thoughts,

“Laura. Why are you hesitating? You saw how the people here reacted. It was really great. The track was so good it wouldn’t have any shortcomings even as an album.”

“B... But, didn’t you just say that it didn’t meet up to your standards?”

Jun Hyuk’s expression was bright and Laura was still gloomy. Jun Hyuk looked at Laura and started talking to her deliberately,

“If your singing was too much of a mess to release an album with, I wouldn’t have let anyone else listen to this track. The quality of music is more important than my opinion.”

Jun Hyuk was looking at Laura warmly.

“And... let’s try it again after you get a little more experience. It’s not a bad idea to keep it in mind as a goal to take on.”

Laura seemed to brighten up a bit. The record label executive was even brighter at Jun Hyuk’s words to Laura, and smiled.



Yoon Kwang Hun and Danny listened to the CD that Jun Hyuk brought, and did not even think about leaving the studio in the apartment. Yoon Kwang Hun was lost in Laura’s aria, and Danny was listening to it on repeat because he was thinking of how a violin melody would be able to surpass her expression.

“Isaac. When is the album being released?”

President Stern was relaxing with a cup of coffee in the living room. Laura’s first album

is enough to make news, but President Stern can be relaxed because he is sure that her album will act as promotions for Jun Hyuk's song.

After hearing Laura's album, all sopranos and soloists are going to try to surpass her. They are going to release albums and Jun Hyuk's 5 songs will be put on stage. Royalties will come in each time, and this revenue will be greater than that of the Berlin Philharmonic.

President Stern snapped out of his joyful thoughts because of Jun Hyuk's question.

"Huh? Album? I'm sure she'll release it as soon as the performance with the New York Philharmonic is over."

"Is that also marketing?"

"Of course. The record label isn't stupid. Your performance with the New York Philharmonic is going to be a success, and the album will make headlines. I'm telling you in advance, but you're really going to be a superstar after the New York performance."

President Stern saw that Jun Hyuk was not fazed by the word 'superstar,' and brought up what he had wanted to say in the studio,

"But Jun."

"Yes?"

"I thought Laura's singing was phenomenal. She's going to change the way people judge the abilities of a soprano singer. If Bel Canto's experimental stage of 'Lucia di Lammermoor' had been 'Scena della pazzia' until now, it'll now be your 'I, E, A, O, U!'"

Donizetti, the Italian composer representing the first half of the 19th century, is a genius who created the opera 'Love Potion' in just 2 days. The aria 'A Furtive Tear' in particular makes the audience's tremble when love's dream comes true with a lyrical and gently melody.

His life was tragic, however. His son could not forget his mother who died during childbirth, was healthy until he caught syphilis and developed an abnormality in the cranial nerve. He spent his last years in an asylum before a miserable death.

The opera that overlaps with his tragic life is 'Lucia di Lammermoor'.

This opera's Act 3 Part 2 is 'Scena della pazzia,' an aria sung in fear and despair in a blood-drenched wedding dress for 17 minutes inside the madness of a sad destiny. This song has become a way to measure a soprano's abilities by how they handle expression it.

It is also the song that made Maria Callas into the top diva of the 20th century.

President Stern was sure that Jun Hyuk's song would surpass aria 'Scena della piazza'.

"Why aren't you satisfied? It was great."

"I also think Laura's is great. It's just that it's not the song that I wanted to hear."

"So? You're going to record with Laura again?"

"We'll see. It could change once we release the score and Laura's album comes out."

"It could change?"

"Yes. Laura's album is going to become a guide. Someone else might be able to figure out my intent to use one tone. Then there will be quite a few people who take the challenge... Who knows? There might be a singer who handles it better than Laura does."

"Then, you'll try it with again with that singer? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes. Of course I have to try it again if there's someone who shows more promise."

No one can follow his ambition to create the perfect music. President Stern tilted his head.

"I said it in the beginning, but I thought that there were tons of singers who could do better than Laura can. But after hearing this, I think I could be wrong. Surpassing Laura is going to be hard for anyone. It's not a matter of being good or not. It might even be impossible to maintain perfect pronunciation in such a flamboyant song."

"Then, I'll have to give up. I'll be satisfied with 70% success."

He said that he would give up, but his expression did not. His face was saying that he would find a soprano to do a world tour with.

Looking at this, even President Stern started to develop an obsession. He wants to hear what Jun Hyuk thinks 100% is.

Chapter 213

There is still 1 month left until the performance, but Jun Hyuk gave up trying to roam the streets freely. The New York Philharmonic and President Stern have covered New York City with placards and posters.

He had been able to go around the city pretty freely because his face has not been known until now, but people recognized him and gathered around him even if he tried to go to the park for a run.

As the official sponsor of the New York Philharmonic, Starbucks put the poster up in every location. The employees stared at him whenever he went to order a coffee.

Due to this, Tara appointed an employee to take care of such errands on his behalf.

“Jun, smile for the people if they gather to you. If they ask for signatures, you just have to give out a few. You have to get used to it.”

“It isn’t easy. When people stick papers out at me, the first thought I have is which to take first.”

Tara laughed jokingly while watching Jun Hyuk being uncomfortable.

“Really? Then, we’ll have to train to make you get used to it. Shall we head out?”

“Where?”

“You have your first rehearsal today. We have to go to Lincoln Center. 30 minutes by foot?”

“What? You want to walk there?”

Tara paid no mind to Jun Hyuk being surprised and got her bag.

“Think of it as a walk. If your fans recognize you, smile for them and give them your signature.”

Tara intended to make Jun Hyuk's image so that he walks through New York streets to and from rehearsal for the next month. She made the decision so that he could become a walking billboard while getting used to dealing with fans.

When they arrived at Lincoln Center for the first rehearsal, Tara gave a towel to a sweaty Jun Hyuk.

"You did well. Just keep on like you did today."

He had looked a bit awkward trying not to frown under the hot sun and smile at his fans, but he will get used to it with time.

While he cooled off, the chorus conductor came to him.

"Maestro, it's an honor to meet you."

"Hello. It's an honor for me to get to perform with the New York Metropolitan Opera."

"About the rehearsal schedule. Is there anything special you're thinking about for Beethoven's choral symphony?"

"Special?"

"Yes. We're currently practicing your choral concerto, but it's later than we had expected. Maestro Carras' orders are very particular so....."

The chorus conductor glanced at Jun Hyuk with an uncomfortable expression.

"Oh, that issue. I'm alright. My conducting isn't an interpretation that'll completely overturn Beethoven's symphony. I think it'd be fine to start rehearsing a week before the performance. I already saw the New York Metropolitan Opera's performance of the choral symphony many times by video."

The chorus conductor's face brightened because this included a compliment.

"Oh. Then, I will relax as well."

"And there will be times when we practice together because I'm on the piano. If there's anything you need, please tell me right away."

The chorus conductor realized then, that the members of his choir have plenty of time. Isn't Jun Hyuk the composer of choral concerto as well as the pianist? He started spilling cold sweat thinking that both maestros would be watching their rehearsals.



Jun Hyuk let out a long sigh in front of the door to the room where the New York Philharmonic was waiting to rehearse, and opened the door. When he entered the room, the members welcomed him with passionate applause.

A middle-aged man with greying hair approached Jun Hyuk with a bouquet of flowers.

"Maestro. This is bandmaster Samuel Gilberto."

The philharmonic employee who had escorted Jun Hyuk gave him an introduction. He took the bouquet and put his hand out to the bandmaster.

"It's an honor, Bandmaster."

"Oh no, it's my honor, Maestro. I never imagined that I would be shaking hands with the living Beethoven."

The bandmaster's smiling face showed that he was not being sarcastic. Jun Hyuk looked uncomfortable because he did not understand the bandmaster's true intention, and the bandmaster spoke,

"No matter what anyone says, your choral concerto does not fall behind Beethoven's work in the slightest bit. It is a blessing for this age."

When the bandmaster was done speaking, the members applauded again. They have already rehearsed with Jun Hyuk's song several times and have come to understand the song's value for themselves.

"I'm flattered."

Jun Hyuk put the bouquet down, bowed to the members for their praise, and went up on the podium.

"Shall we start rehearsal and speak personally later? I'll tell you about the choral

symphony that I'm thinking about first."

The members geared their attention to Jun Hyuk. How had this young conductor interpreted Beethoven, and how would he try to express that interpretation?

"There's a common saying in Korea, I guess it could be called an idiom... It can be translated as 'returning to my hometown in silk clothes'."

The members started thinking to try and understand the meaning behind the saying.

"Silk clothing in this means societal and material success. It means that the person goes to a big city like New York to find success before going back to their hometown. The person is, of course, not going back home to settle. It's to show off the success."

Everyone nodded. They realized that the saying expresses the human desire to show off.

"It's immature, right? This is how I think of Beethoven's choral symphony."

"You're not saying that choral symphony is immature?"

"Of course not. I'm saying that it's immature to go back home in silk clothes just to show off to the people from childhood who knew you as unfortunate and poor."

The members know Beethoven's life well. And they imagined Beethoven in silk clothing.

"He'll be arrogant to the people of his hometown, won't he? And the wish that these people will envy, praise, and suck up to him. I saw that hope in Beethoven's choral symphony."

"Whew. It's a different kind of interpretation that I'm hearing for the first time."

The bandmaster spoke, and the oboist pulled a bill out from his pocket, handing it over to a flutist. It is obvious what kind of bet they made.

"Then....."

Jun Hyuk spoke as he picked up the baton.

“Let’s hear how you express this silk clothing. Shall we start with molto vivace (very fast and lively) in the 2nd part?”

Everyone picked up their instruments when Jun Hyuk held the baton high.

Furtwangler, who used to lead the Berlin Philharmonic, performed the 2nd part in 12 minutes and Karajan did 9 minutes.

The fastest that choral symphony has been performed is 59 minutes by John Elliott, pioneer of Baroque. But, the 2nd part took 12 minutes.

The 2nd part’s tempo is completely different according to the conductor. The members who know the choral symphony’s wild feeling must have thought that Jun Hyuk would conduct in an incredibly fast speed, and they looked tense. However, he continued conducting so plainly that it could be considered average.

When they were done performing the 2nd part. Jun Hyuk put the baton down.

“Very good. Let’s end it here for today. Until next time, I want you all to think about Beethoven’s wish to go back to his hometown to show off his success. Also, think about how you will express that.”

Jun Hyuk bowed and came down from the podium. Someone stopped Jun Hyuk as he was trying to leave.

“Maestro.”

“Yes.”

“Are the rumors true?”

The person speaking is the oboist who made the bet.

“What rumors are you talking about? There are too many rumors surrounding me.”

“That you remember everything you hear once... That no matter how vast the instrument organization is, you remember everything as though it is recorded.”

“Yes, that is true.”

“Then, you’ll remember all of choral symphony.”

“Yes. The score and 21 CDs I listened to.”

The oboist hesitated for a moment before speaking up carefully,

“Then, why aren’t you saying anything?”

“Ha ha. Are you talking about the prank?”

Everyone including the oboist looked surprised when Jun Hyuk laughed. They had no idea what prank he was talking about.

“...Yes.”

“I didn’t say anything because I know that it’s a prank. If the 4 people hadn’t been playing a prank, the New York Philharmonic’s fame would be fake... And I would have had to ask Maestro Carras to switch those 4 people out.”

“Oy, we could have been in trouble. We could have gotten fired.”

The young oboist smiled and scratched his head. When there is a conductor who is not old and famous, the performers – the younger ones in particular – like to show their curiosity with pranks like this.

“It’s alright because I didn’t think it was a mistake. If the part that you had gotten wrong was your true ability, the rest of the performance would not have come out. On top of that, it would not have been easy to make a mistake when your fingers remember it.”

Jun Hyuk disappeared with a smile, and the bandmaster Samuel Gilberto glared at the 4 performers.

Chapter 214

The next day, Jun Hyuk and Tara walked slowly, as though they went out for a walk, to Avery Fisher Hall. It is the day to rehearse choral concerto with Maestro Carras. Jun Hyuk joined as the pianist.

“Jun. You haven’t heard us play your song, right?”

“Yes.”

“Mr. Yoon sitting all the way over there has heard it several times. Ha ha.”

Maestro Carras gestured to Yoon Kwang Hun, sitting in the audience. Jun Hyuk saw that Yoon Kwang Hun was waving at him.

Jun Hyuk shook his head. Yoon Kwang Hun is basically the audience who gives him the most burden and caution.

“But, am I alone? Where is Danny?”

“Oh. I’ve become easily scared since I’ve gotten older. It takes too much strength to handle 2 young performers at the same time. I’m planning on dealing with each of you separately first. That should be okay, right?”

“Is that a characteristic of maestros? Everyone fakes out their difficulties so much.”

“No no. I’m not faking. I feel like you alone will be hard.”

Carras waved his hand and Jun Hyuk sat in front of the piano.

“Oh right. I didn’t call a page turner because I figured you wouldn’t need one. I thought that would just get in your way anyway. That’s okay, right?”

“Yes.”

A ‘page turner’ is someone who turns the pages of the score, just as it sounds. Pianists do not have a hand to turn the score while performing, and this is where the ‘page

turner' comes in.

Horowitz said, 'The person turning the pages of a score could ruin an entire performance'. Page turners must be present in complex and difficult performances.

While the performer is concentrating, if the page turner turns the page too quickly or slowly, the flow could be cut off, ruining the performance. This is why the page turner and pianist's teamwork is considered so important.

Pianists often lose count of the beat during live performances because the page turner did not match the timing, so it is inevitable that pianists look for page turners who they work well with.

When the page turner is turning the page, they cannot block the pianist's view, must dress modestly so as not to upstage the pianist, and they cannot even wear accessories. Sensitive pianists are even affected by the page turner's anxious breathing, so page turners need to self-obliterate themselves.

They always need to go on stage after the performer and stay seated while the performers are applauded after.

Some call page turners 'the cold hand that dominates the performance' or 'the hidden presence on stage, the 2nd performer'.

Page turners are another important presence on stage that the audience does not understand.

"Jun. You can just enjoy it since it's your first time and then join in for the 2nd part."

"You'll give a performance that I can't stay away from to just enjoy it. How could I stay still?"

The orchestra members tensed up when they heard Jun Hyuk say that he would perform with them.

The string instruments started with Dimitri Carras' baton, and Jun Hyuk looked up to look at the conductor.

He had not guessed that it would be such an aggressive performance!

Belgium National Orchestra's Pierre Boulez gave a performance that emphasized elegance. They had received praise for showing a comparison of past and future Beethoven through an old maestro and young Jun Hyuk.

Thinking of Dimitri Carras' experience, Jun Hyuk thought that he would give a similar performance, but it was clearly distinct.

It was the same as forcing him to choose whether he will challenge such a tight and solid performance, or if he will put his head down and join.

When the 1st part was over, darkness enwrapped the theater for over 10 seconds. Dimitri Carras took a glance at Jun Hyuk, smiled, and held up the baton again. Jun Hyuk already had his fingers on the piano.

The members all saw Jun Hyuk's hands. The piano they had only heard of by rumor. When they heard that Jun Hyuk would be joining as the pianist, most of them were so full of anticipation that they bought Jun Hyuk's jazz album to listen to.

The members admired the connected configuration that flows like water and the grand technique that makes dissonance sound like a beautiful melody. This is the moment they get to hear that piano for themselves.

Maestro Carras' baton was firm, as though warning them that they need to be fully prepared.

However, Jun Hyuk's piano was not aggressive or fierce, like a warm sunlight that had seeped in from nowhere.

He did not mind the New York Philharmonic's rough performance and continued playing with a gentle touch on his own. He made the concerto into a solo song, treating the orchestra's playing as an accompaniment. He is showing his ability as a pianist, showing strength only when necessary, precise fingering, flexibility in wrists and agility in fingers.

The most surprised person was not Maestro Carras or anyone in the orchestra. It was Yoon Kwang Hun, sitting nervous in the audience.

Jun Hyuk's piano right now is not a copy or reappearance of someone else. It is Jun Hyuk's piano. But, there was no feeling of anger, resentment, or pain. It is a completely different piano with a gentle peace and mellow touch.

He could tell as soon as he heard Jun Hyuk's piano that what he is playing now is not for the choral concerto performance. It is a performance for Yoon Kwang Hun, the only person sitting in the 2,800 seat Avery Fisher Hall.

Jun Hyuk had made the New York Philharmonic into an accompaniment so that he could show Yoon Kwang Hun that he has matured and escaped from the despair of the past. The New York Philharmonic's private theater is being used for a one-person audience.

"That kid always surprises people so dramatically."

Yoon Kwang Hun calm his beating heart and got lost in Jun Hyuk's flowing song.

But, the conductor Carras and orchestra members could not hide their embarrassment. Dimitri Carras in particular had to make larger movements with his arms in order to steady the shaking orchestra.

Dimitri Carras conducted until the 3rd part and put the baton down. It would be impossible for him to steady the orchestra and take them through the 4th part.

"Jun. Is this the choral concerto you're thinking of?"

"It's one of them."

"One of them? In detail!"

Dimitri Carras raise his voice, but he is not angry or excited. It is strong curiosity of a new image of a composer.

"The piano I just played was something I thought of while listening to the 1st part. In a bookcase with 1000 books that are organized well, the one book that is in disorder. In a company where all employees are men wearing black suits, one woman who appears wearing a red dress. I thought about what this kind of feeling would be."

"You're saying that you're playing the role of pianist instead of composer right now?"

"I would have done the same even thinking as the composer. I want to play something new every time."

"Are you saying that art is always a new interpretation? Like you said in the interview

in Belgium?”

“Pretty much. I actually wanted to do an arrangement or play a completely different song as soon as I heard the 1st part, but I’ll do that next time at a later opportunity.”

Dimitri Carras and the orchestra members did not hide their perplexed expressions. It was an interpretation and performance that was so unique it could make the ensemble collapse.

“This is troubling.....”

“Is it too unfamiliar?”

“It’s not just unfamiliar. Isn’t it? Is my feeling wrong? I felt it in the piano touch that had the faint feeling of an elegant woman’s charm. It would have been much more fitting if it had been like an enchanting woman who is enough to thaw a frozen heart.”

“So you’re saying it’s not a flower blooming amidst suits?”

Maestro Carras just nodded. It is a moment when he should not be pushing it.

A soloist is another universe in a concerto. The moment that a soloist’s individual performance creates fireworks with the orchestra is one of a concerto’s highlights.

But, if it is to the point where the ensemble collapses, there begins a dissension between the conductor and soloist. However, concertos are ultimately for the orchestra. In the end, the conductor and soloist are bound to compromise.

The soloist right now is also the composer. If the composer himself says that his interpretation is right, there is no solution for even the conductor. The members held their breaths as they watched Jun Hyuk.

“Then I’ll bring out more of the feeling he had while writing the song.”

Conductor Carras let out a long sigh of relief. It is probably his unstubborn free style that shows confidence, but it is also marvelous that he could change his style as he wants in one place.

“Then, shall we start with the 2nd part again?”

The feeling Jun Hyuk had when he was first writing the song. When Beethoven could not even hear and was obsessed with one melody and clinging to the thematic melody of the 4th part, nearing on madness.

He put that feeling into the piano and played for the conductor and orchestra.

They heard Jun Hyuk's piano melody and the maestro smiled from ear to ear.

Chapter 215

“Why did you change it? The first performance was much better. It was touching.”

“Can you win the conductor no matter how stubborn you remain? And I liked both of them.”

“Your piano’s changed a lot.”

“You only heard how it was different, right? Look at the whole thing.”

Jun Hyuk knew what Yoon Kwang Hun was talking about. He would not have paid attention to the orchestra because of his changed piano.

“I heard the whole thing many times before you joined. Anyway, tomorrow’s the rehearsal for choral symphony? Can I go?”

“See it during the performance. It won’t be as good if you see it in advance during rehearsals.”

Jun Hyuk was in a cold sweat just thinking about having Yoon Kwang Hun’s eyes on the back of his head in rehearsals.

“Oy. Fine. Do well so I’m not disappointed. I like the 2nd part of choral symphony the most.”

Yoon Kwang Hun wanted to see Jun Hyuk scolding the New York Philharmonic, but he ended up just imagining it.



“No. A bit more... it could be hard to differentiate between elegance and arrogance. So you have to go deeper into it.”

The rehearsal for choral symphony was stagnant because they could not get over the last river. He had adjusted the performances of each orchestra member, but there was

something of the subtlest difference that was bothering Jun Hyuk.

The members were equally frustrated. They had fully understood and grasped what it was that Jun Hyuk was looking for. There were times when they made mistakes on stage, but they were repeatedly giving perfect performances even though it is just a rehearsal.

The chorus has not joined yet, but they had performed so well in rehearsals with the vocal soloists that they could say that it was perfect. Though it was not satisfying to the conductor.

Jun Hyuk is not greedy. He realized something while recording with Laura Goldberg. Laura is someone who will become the greatest prima donna of this century, but she could not bring out the sound that he wanted. The New York Philharmonic is the best symphony orchestra, but he needs to admit that there is a limit.

If he does not admit that there is a limit, it just becomes difficult for everyone. Jun Hyuk is learning to compromise with other musicians.



Danny almost clucked his tongue. Maestro Carras does not seem to be a Mediterranean person from Greece who enjoys a relaxed life.

It is more fitting to think of him as a passive Italian.

“Jun, he’s worse than you. This is the first time I’ve seen such a sharp orchestra. Your conducting at the Queen Elisabeth Competition was like it would swallow the audience whole, but what we’re doing now is going to reduce them to ashes.”

“I was surprised too. That old man is savage. There was a monster living inside of him. What do you think? Is it feasible?”

“It’s actually a bit dangerous. I have to do my own performance, but I feel like I’m chasing the orchestra. We can’t collapse like this.....”

This is how aggressive Maestro Carras’ conducting is. They have not spoken about their performing together since they exchanged opinions on Jun Hyuk’s first piano performance. He silently leads the orchestra with slight mismatches between the

piano, violin, and orchestra that seem to be done on purpose.

Danny thought that it is a huge relief that he started practicing a month earlier. Furthermore, he is realizing that he is able to follow along with Maestro Carras' conducting because he is living in Jun Hyuk's apartment and being coached by the composer while practicing.

"You'll get used to it during rehearsals. And when you're done and go back to the apartment, practice again. Then, you won't be shaky."

"Whose advice is this?"

"What?"

"Conductor? Composer? Or performer? Who is it?"

Danny's joking question made Jun Hyuk cluck his tongue.

"Are you stupid? This is the most basic thing."

Jun Hyuk went into rehearsals everyday – one day as a conductor, one has as a pianist – and time went by quickly as he spent his time busily.



When there was only a week left until the performance, Jun Hyuk's walking to and from work became such a hot topic that it even made news. Nothing strayed from Tara's expectations.

People waited for Jun Hyuk in front of his apartment building every morning and walked with him to Lincoln Center. There were more and more people who came with concert posters or Jun Hyuk's album to ask for signatures.

The interesting part was that the people who walked with him everyday even took care of his security.

"Hey there! You got a signature yesterday, too. Think of other people."

"Hey! What outlet are you a reporter for? Why are you blocking the street? There's

only a week left until the concert. Are you going to take responsibility for it if he's late to rehearsals?"

People yelling like this enclosed Jun Hyuk to walk with him to Lincoln Center. Jun Hyuk became used to the faces he kept seeing, and expressed his familiarity. And he started getting used to the growing crowds. He realized that fans are not cumbersome, but people who love music or are anticipating his music.

With the concert date near, there were no empty rooms in New York's hotels. Beethoven's name was the best marketing strategy and keyword.

It overlapped with summer vacation, so other maestros arrived in New York and most students of New York music schools did not go back home for break.

The New York Philharmonic's concert had become the highlight of this year's Midsummer Night Festival.

The amount of equipment for recording and live broadcasting increased in the concert hall, and they had reached the end of rehearsals.



When there was not much time left until the concert, Yoon Kwang Hun stopped going to watch rehearsals. He knows well that everyone has become sensitive and having someone watch rehearsals would just be a bother.

While Yoon Kwang Hun was drinking coffee alone in an apartment without Jun Hyuk and Danny, the front door opened with someone entering as though she lived there.

A black haired woman in jeans and a short sleeve t-shirt was so surprised that her jaw dropped.

"Are you Amelia?"

A beauty with black hair, sharp nose, and big eyes. Yoon Kwang Hun realized that it is the face he saw in pictures from Jun Hyuk and the internet.

"Oh! Mr. Yoon?"

Amelia had put her big suitcase down in the living room and been surprised to find Yoon Kwang Hun, but remembered talking to Jun Hyuk over the phone. He had told her that Danny would be performing with him and that Yoon Kwang Hun was staying at the apartment until the concert was over.

Amelia ran to Yoon Kwang Hun without hesitation, embracing him as though seeing an old friend.

“I really wanted to meet you, Mr. Yoon.”

“Yes. I wanted to meet you as well, Amelia. I see you’ve come because of Jun Hyuk’s concert.”

Yoon Kwang Hun pulled Amelia’s arms from around his neck, and laughed awkwardly. An old man from Korea is not used to such friendliness.

“Yes. I took off time for about 2 weeks. Of course, I need to see the performance. It’s Jun and the New York Philharmonic.”

Yoon Kwang Hun sat Amelia on the living room sofa and made coffee in the kitchen.

“I see you’re really busy even in the off season.”

“There’s nothing to do about it. It’s because of my contract with a sponsor. During season, it’s Asia, Europe, and North America. Off-season, it’s touring South America including my home country Argentina. Fortunately, my contract with the sponsor is over next year.”

Amelia looked bittersweet that her contract would be over.

“Then, you’ll sign on with a new sponsor?”

Yoon Kwang Hun gave her the coffee cup and she sipped on it.

“Yes. I’ve had a few offers from sponsors in Europe. I’ve released a few albums and the reactions to my performances are still good... I’m going to make it a condition with the new sponsor that they can’t get involved with my touring schedule, though the money I receive will probably decrease drastically.”

“Is it because of Jun?”

“Yes. Even now, we’re seeing each other face-to-face for the first time in a year. I would like to spend some more time with him.”

“I see.”

Though they had been apart for a long time, Amelia had made great efforts to maintain her affection for Jun. Yoon Kwang Hun heard from Jun Hyuk that Amelia’s sponsor is one of the top companies in Argentina. The sponsorship would have been immense, but she is giving that up.

Yoon Kwang Hun could get a glimpse at how Amelia feels for Jun Hyuk.

But what about Jun Hyuk?

He did not seem to be making much of an effort and he did not show yearning for Amelia. He lives with satisfaction as long as he has music in front of him.

Yoon Kwang Hun’s face was not bright, and Amelia did not miss this.

“Oh. Did something happen to Jun?”

Amelia’s face immediately became dark. Jun Hyuk’s erratic phone calls had been bugging her. Amelia looked at Yoon Kwang Hun and asked cautiously.

“Something happen to Jun...? Oh ha ha. Don’t misunderstand. There’s nothing like that. And Jun doesn’t have the personality to chase girls.”

“Phew. I thought... I thought maybe.”

When Yoon Kwang Hun saw Amelia brighten up again, he realized that even though she is a star pianist who stands under a spotlight on a stage in front of countless people, she is still just a young girl.

They talked for a while over coffee. Amelia told him all about how she and Jun Hyuk met because of a harmonica and Bach’s cantata, to the performance at Clayton and their travels every weekend.

“Why did you make such a controversial statement at the Tchaikovsky Competition? You didn’t have to do it.”

“Because it’s the truth. My piano was upgraded all because of Jun.”

Yoon Kwang Hun saw that Amelia’s eyes sparkled every time she spoke about Jun Hyuk, and could feel how strong her affection is for him.

There is something that he had been resolved that he would not tell Amelia even if he were to meet her one day. But seeing her affection for himself, his resolution came crashing down. He thought that this must be how a parent feels.

“Amelia.”

“Yes.”

“Old people like me need to use few words. Especially when talking to young people. It’s because we start to give sermons instead of holding a conversation. That’s how people become old.”

“I’m the type who likes to listen to sermons from old people. It’s okay. You can say it.”

Amelia smiled.

“A young genius is cool and romantic because he shows you things that other people can’t even imagine.”

“You’re talking about Jun, right?”

“Yes. He’s cool. I too fell for him when he was 15 and memorized all of Marlowe’s symphony after hearing it once.”

Amelia remembers the moment she fell for Jun Hyuk as well. The shock and bliss she felt when a skinny Asian boy changed her piano at once. It was the moment when it was just the two of them playing the piano in a practice room.

“There is a word omitted before most geniuses. It’s ‘young’. But Jun is just a person even if he is getting older.”

“Yes. No one can avoid it, even geniuses.”

Up to here, Amelia had been expecting the obvious statement to keep their unchanging affection.

“What do you think a middle-aged genius will be like?”

“Excuse me? A middle-aged genius?”

“Have you ever imagined it? A genius who is 40 or 50 years old?”

Amelia had never thought about it, but realized that Jun Hyuk’s genius would not change, and only his body would age.

“I see. I’ve never thought about a 40 year old genius.”

“A genius needs to die young to become a legend because it’s tragic but romantic. No one thinks that a middle-aged genius is romantic. No. They don’t call that person a genius.”

“Then what do they call him?”

“A madman. Or a monster.”

“Excuse me? A madman?”

Amelia looked at him with surprise. He is like a father to Jun Hyuk, but she knew that they are not blood-related. But he and Jun Hyuk are the same in how they surprise people.

“He’s no longer cool or romantic. And since he was a genius since he was young, he will have succeeded beyond wanting more by the time he is middle-aged. That includes wealth, fame, respect, and achievements. He won’t need to have a sense of what others are thinking and feeling... Everyone will look up to him and be envious.”

Yoon Kwang Hun stopped talking and hesitated again. He now needs to say what he really wants to. He does not know how Amelia will take it...

“His nature as a monster that will come out from then on. He’ll try to create music that most people could not even imagine. Why? Because he has everything! All that’s left is what he alone knows, and he’ll jump through hoops to make that music a reality. It’ll be like the old kings of the past who tried to live forever.”

Amelia listened to Yoon Kwang Hun silently. She does not know what he is trying to say yet.

“Even though that could never happen. It would only be possible if Jun Hyuk had someone who is like a copy of him. Jun Hyuk will probably need 200 clones of himself. He’ll make music beyond what Inferno was and those clones will be necessary to play that music with an orchestra.”

“You don’t think?”

Amelia thought that Yoon Kwang Hun’s worries were severe, but she could understand. Don’t parents always worry about nothing?

“Hm... Do you want to take a look at this?”

Yoon Kwang Hun took Amelia to the studio inside the house. He turned on Laura Goldberg’s CD and gave Amelia the scores for the 5 songs.

“First, listen to this. You’ll be able to understand what I’m saying after listening to this.”

Yoon Kwang Hun quietly closed the door and went into the living room alone. He had felt from a long time ago that Jun Hyuk is never satisfied.

The ecstatic expression he has after completing a song starts to change little by little from the moment the score is put in someone else’s hands. And he is in a hurry to hide his disappointment when the end result comes out. Everyone thought of and accepted that as another aspect of Jun Hyuk’s genius.

The first time Jun Hyuk revealed his true thoughts is regarding Laura’s aria, that it is 70%.

If such a great result is 70%, what is the percentage he has been satisfied with until now? It is nerve wrecking just to think about.

Yoon Kwang Hun could be sure after Laura’s recording. Jun Hyuk is living without being able to be satisfied with the music in his life.

After 30 minutes, Amelia opened the door and came out with a flushed face.

“Mr. Yoon. This... Is this Jun’s work? With Laura Goldberg singing?”

“Yes. How was it?”

“Laura was this amazing?”

“Jun wrote it when he had time during the Queen Elisabeth Competition, and the recording was done in a month. Of course, Jun directed it. It’s great, right?”

Amelia’s expression was one of astonishment.

“Jun’s works are always beyond expectations, so there’s nothing left to say about that. But Laura’s aria is really... I now realize why Jun was raving about her. It was a perfect bel canto aria.”

“And it’s without an accompaniment.”

“Exactly. It was hard to believe that it was without an accompaniment.”

Amelia had still not recovered from the shock. Yoon Kwang Hun needed to say something more surprising to Amelia.

“But Jun said that Laura’s singing only met 70% of his standards.”

“What? 70%?”

Amelia seemed more surprised about the 70% than she had been with Laura’s singing.

“Now can you understand what I’m saying? Jun is the type of person who says that this kind of singing is only 70%. He’ll try to fit in with others now, but those complaints are going to stack up and explode one day. That’ll be when he has gained everything but music.”

Amelia was speechless for a while. She finally understood why Yoon Kwang Hun was saying that Jun Hyuk might become a monster.

She spoke cautiously to Yoon Kwang Hun,

“Can you tell me why you’re telling me this?”

“I won’t tell you to prevent him from becoming a madman, since it might be impossible. But if you love Jun and you are going to continue loving him, I’m asking you to keep loving a Jun who might become a monster. I said that I’m 40 years old, but that time might come faster.”

Amelia did not say anything for a while, got up from the sofa, and placed a light kiss on Yoon Kwang Hun's forehead.

"Now I know why Jun is so wise."

She sat back down and spoke slowly,

"I don't know how wacky Jun will become, but I won't forget what you said today. And I can't promise that I'll root for and love him while he's being called a monster, but I promise that I'll make the effort to keep loving him."

"That is plenty. Anything beyond that is greedy."

Yoon Kwang Hun looked at Amelia's beautiful face and could not stop thinking that it would be better if Jun Hyuk loved her a little more.

Chapter 216

Jun Hyuk and Danny finished rehearsals, came back home, and threw their exhausted bodies on the sofa.

“Did Mr. Yoon go out?”

“Because he knows New York City well, he must have gone out to take a walk.”

Danny saw a large suitcase in the living room.

“What is this? Did he pack his bags? Is he going back to Korea?”

Jun Hyuk saw the suitcase and realized right away that it is Amelia’s.

“Oh. Amelia’s here. That’s hers.”

“Oh. I guess I’d better run away. She kind of scares me.”

Jun Hyuk laughed and Danny frowned.

“Danny, I’m not laughing because of you. Imagine it. We weren’t here, so the two of them met. What do you think it was like?”

Danny started laughing right away. They imagined a middle-aged Asian man and open and lively young South American woman coming face-to-face as a scene from a comedy movie. The apartment entrance opened while the two people were laughing.

Amelia had her arm linked with Yoon Kwang Hun’s and entered while laughing, and Yoon Kwang Hun had several large shopping bags in both of his hands.

“Where did you go when you two are meeting for the first time? Shopping?”

“Yeah. They’re gifts from Amelia because of the performance. There are a few tuxedos and suits for Danny and you. We also got a suit for me and a dress for Amelia. We’re going to wear them and go to the concert together.”

But, Jun Hyuk could not respond. Amelia had run to him and was covering him in kisses.

Yoon Kwang Hun tossed the shopping bags in the living room and slipped out of the apartment. Danny also hastily followed Yoon Kwang Hun.



“You still don’t look satisfied, Maestro.”

When the last rehearsal was over, bandmaster Samuel Gilberto looked at Jun Hyuk and spoke cautiously.

The orchestra’s performance was perfect and the vocal soloists had been great. Even the few who had only opened and closed their mouths like goldfish, had mispronunciations, and weak voices had elegant and saintly singing that even moved Maestro Carras.

But Jun Hyuk still looked a bit trifled.

“No. I’ll tell you confidently that tomorrow’s performance will be a success.”

Jun Hyuk quickly changed his expression and spoke loudly while smiling. However, the bandmaster had already seen Jun Hyuk’s uneasy face. There is nothing he can do now though.

“Maestro. Is there anything you want to ask us for the last time?”

“Hm... Oh. There is one thing.”

The orchestra members and chorus, almost 300 people, looked to Jun Hyuk.

“Do you all remember what I said in the beginning about how Beethoven felt? Beethoven needed to withstand an alcoholic father who was trying to make him the next Mozart. But he succeeded in Vienna, where even Mozart had failed, and he is full of the desire to brag about this success. That’s in the choral symphony that we need to perform tomorrow.”

Jun Hyuk hesitated for a moment and organized his thoughts.

“Actually... When he is alone after arrogantly strutting and bragging like this... He'll be really embarrassed and full of regret. Why did I do that? No?”

No one responded. Even if someone had that experience, it is embarrassing to respond.

“Then, do you think our Beethoven regretted it? Don't you think he would have?”

Though no one responded, they knew that Beethoven would not be one to regret it.

“Alright. Then I'll listen to the answer to this question during tomorrow's performance.”

Jun Hyuk's last words bewildered the members. He will listen at the performance? When they looked at each other in confusion, Jun Hyuk bowed to them and left the theater.



Danny focused on practicing with the score in the living room, while Yoon Kwang Hun laid on the sofa and enjoyed Danny's violin.

Jun Hyuk came back to the house, saw this and sighed, taking the violin away from Danny.

“What is it? Why'd you do that?”

“Quit it. You think it'll be helpful to practice right now when the concert is tomorrow? It's better to just relax and rest.”

Danny knows this well, but he could not let go of the violin if he wanted to relax. This is the biggest stage he is getting on since he started on his path as a professional performer. Thinking of the concert in a day, he could not relax.

“But what about Amelia?”

“She's fighting with your score.”

Yoon Kwang Hun slowly got up from the sofa and pointed to the soundproof studio.

“What? My score?”

“I think she was shocked after hearing Laura’s singing. She’s determined to implement beyond that on the piano. Hey, are South American girls always like that? Do they run in without thinking?”

“I don’t know that. Amelia’s the only South American girl I know.”

Jun Hyuk laughed and sat on the sofa, while Yoon Kwang Hun snapped his fingers.

“Danny, Jun. I thought of something fun. What do you think? Do you want to try it?”

Yoon Kwang Hun seemed excited as though he had come up with an original idea.

“Jun plays the orchestra part on the piano, Amelia the piano part, and Danny the violin. What do you think?”

“What? The choral symphony between the three of us?”

Danny’s eyes became round.

“Yeah. Danny, since you’re nervous as it is, you’ll be doing something different. Amelia hasn’t played the piano part yet. I’m curious about her interpretation of it too.”

Jun Hyuk thought that it would be a fun combination, and jumped up from the sofa. He carefully opened the door to the soundproof studio, and a piano melody flooded out.

Amelia was so concentrated that it was hard to interrupt her, and the 3 men entered the room and closed the door. They quietly sat down and started enjoying Amelia’s piano.

“Huh? When did you come in?”

After she played the 5 songs one after the other, she got up from the piano.

“Jun, what do you think? I played as the score said but strangely, the emotion doesn’t come out.”

“It’ll be like that. The piano isn’t fun, right? One hand does nothing because there’s no accompaniment or chord.”

Piano songs are usually configured with an accompaniment and melody. These 5 songs however, are for a person's voice. It only has one melody.

"Yeah. I'll have to arrange the whole thing. And I tried combining the 5 songs..."

"Those 5 songs can never mix. I had no intention of making them a 5-sheet song. Instead, I'm thinking of making a piano concerto that's played with one hand. One that's 30 minutes to play the 5 songs in continuance."

"What? A piano concerto?"

The 3 people shouted at the same time to Jun Hyuk's words.

"Yeah. Why are you surprised? Playing the piano with one hand isn't a new thing."

Bolero's composer, Maurice Ravel, wrote for pianist Paul Wittgenstein, who lost his right hand in WWI. Paul Wittgenstein is also the brother of genius philosopher of the period, Ludwig Wittgenstein.

does not have any shortcomings when compared to normal piano concertos. If one listens to the music without watching a video, it would be hard to tell that it was being played with one hand.

"You already made a concerto?"

When Amelia looked at him in surprise, Jun Hyuk tapped his head instead of responding.

"The configuration is done. I just have to move it onto a score."

Jun Hyuk winked and Amelia smiled, thinking that he had created a concerto for her as a pianist.

"But why did you all come in here together?"

"Oh. We were thinking that the 3 of us should play the choral concerto together."

Jun Hyuk tapped Danny's shoulder as he spoke.

"He's so nervous, we should help him relax."

Amelia was already opening the score. She had been wanting to play the song too. Since it is a concerto, it's not a song that she can play on her own. It's only possible if the maestro picks her."

"Mr. Yoon, please."

Yoon Kwang Hun dragged a chair to the piano.

He sat next to Amelia acting as the page turner, and relaxed as he enjoyed their performance. Danny warmed up and relaxed with Jun Hyuk and Amelia's novel performance.



On the day of the concert, the apartment was busy with people. President Stern, Tara, and three or four employees arrived first, and Danny's agent came running as well.

"Oh, Amelia. I heard you were here. You're becoming more beautiful by the day."

"Hello, Isaac."

President Stern gave Amelia a hug and then, he took both of her hands in his.

"Amelia. Your sponsor contract is over next year, right? Along with your agency contract?"

"Yes."

"Then, do you want to sign on with our company? I'm willing to make the contract with great conditions."

"Thank you, but I'll decline. My agent has been suffering until now and just started getting better since last year. I can't turn my back now."

President Stern looked at Amelia smiling for a moment and tapped Jun Hyuk saying,

"Jun, you have an eye for women. It's hard to find young woman with such loyalty these days."

"Isaac, my loyalty's pretty great too. Tara, what about what I asked for?"

Tara took a small box out of her bag and whispered to Jun Hyuk,

“I took a lot of care in picking this out. You’re going to have to thank me.”

Jun Hyuk gave the box to Amelia.

“Wear this to the concert today. And... I’ll tell you honestly. I don’t know this stuff, so I asked Tara to help me. It’s okay, right?”

Amelia’s eyes sparkled as she opened the box. A necklace with dozens of jewels was sparkling inside.

“I asked her to pick out something that would go well with the black dress you wore yesterday. I hope you like it.”

Yoon Kwang Hun saw Amelia’s expression of fascination and mumbled,

“Damn it. Do I have to get out of the apartment again? This early in the morning.....”

Chapter 217

Jun Hyuk and Danny finished getting ready to go to the concert hall. President Stern sat on the sofa and drank a cup of coffee.

“Jun. Your concert is at night, right? Maestro Carras is in the afternoon?”

“Yes. Maestro Carras is at 4. I’m at 8.”

“Tara, take care of him. I’ll go with Mr. Yoon and Amelia in time for the afternoon performance.”

Tara nodded and left the apartment.

“Tara, are we walking today too?”

“No. We can’t do that on the day of the concert. I have a great limousine waiting. Oh, and don’t forget to wave at the fans waiting out front when you’re going out to the limousine.”

The employees left first with the tuxedo and suit, and Danny’s agent also took his violin.

Reporters and dozens of people outside the apartment applauded while Jun Hyuk got into the limousine, and he did not forget to wave as Tara had told him to do.

The limousine arrived at Lincoln Center in under 10 minutes. He had not taken the limousine for convenience, but a service for the reporters who would be taking pictures of him.

Avery Hall was busy with setting up sound equipment. There were tons of cords, microphones, and small cameras hanging to finish the album recording, live broadcasting, and blu-ray package all at one time.

The first thing that Jun Hyuk, Danny, and Maestro Carras needed to do is to stand in each of their positions on stage to set the camera angles to them.

When Maestro Carras stood on the podium, Jun Hyuk at the piano, and Danny on the opposite side, the film crew moved busily to adjust the camera angles while radio in to the director.

The director okayed everything and the film crew disappeared from stage, allowing the orchestra members to enter.

The first rehearsal with sound check under Dimitri Carras' conducting started.

Page Break



Even though it was early, a lot of special guests were gathered backstage.

“What is that? So, all of the harsh critics flocked here. I’m sure you’ve all come fully prepared to pour out the criticism?”

“What are you talking about! We don’t care about your conducting at all. We’ve come all the way here to see pianist Jun and maestro Jun.”

Maestros like Berlin Philharmonic’s Simon Lettles and Serril Petrenko, Philadelphia’s Bruno Kazel, and Boston Symphony’s Patrick Quinn shook hands with Dimitri Carras and joked around.

“Jun, is this your first performance as a pianist?”

“Yes. Don’t expect too much. I’m just flowing along with the orchestra.”

“Well? I’m sure we’ll know who’s helping who once the concert is over?”

The maestros kept joking to help today’s anxious performers relax.

After chatting for a while and it was neared time to go into the theater, the maestros left. They went back to the theater entrance to interview and take pictures for reporters.

The audience began to enter with anticipation an hour before the concert. Maybe because Juilliard is inside Lincoln Center and Jun Hyuk is from Clayton, there were a

lot of young spectators.

New York press was camped out in front of Avery Hall. Today's visitors are worth making news. The jazz, blues, and rock musicians participating in New York's Midsummer Night Festival entered, and maestros took part in interviews.

When Amelia arrived in a splendid dress with President Stern and Yoon Kwang Hun on either arm, reporters gathered around her. She could become the main shot of an article just because she is Jun Hyuk's girlfriend. Her image also makes a good picture.



"Alright. We have practiced so much that we don't need to be nervous. What we need to do now is not to give a perfect performance without mistakes, but to show everyone what a great piece the choral concerto is."

Maestro Carras was relaxed as he spoke his last words to the orchestra.

"Danny."

"Yes, Maestro."

Maestro Carras tapped Danny's shoulder as he spoke,

"When today's concert is over, your agent is going to become really busy."

"Excuse me?"

Danny had not been able to shake off the anxiety yet and did not realize what Carras was saying right away.

"If you perform as you did in rehearsals, the world is going to go crazy. You're going to have a flood of requests, since I'm already thinking of the violin concerto for next season's repertoire."

"Oh, thank you, Maestro."

Danny gained confidence from a great maestro's compliments, and was able to calm himself down.

“Then, our orchestra and chorus need to go on stage. Please prepare.”

The theater staff with headphones told them that it is time to start. The orchestra and chorus went out on stage and began to take position. There were chairs for the chorus because they need to wait until the 3rd part.

When the chorus is small, there are often cases when they enter the stage after the 3rd part, but it is normal for them to enter with the orchestra when it is a large scale performance like today's. It's difficult to have more than 100 people enter the stage in between parts, and it could break the attention.

They heard clapping from the audience and when the murmuring decreased, the protagonists of the performance walked out. When the conductor, pianist, violinist, and vocal soloists entered, the audience exploded in applause.

Shouts and whistles spread throughout the theater, showing that young people in their 20s were occupying the seats.

The young are not ones to hide their emotions. They could even boo if the concert does not meet up to their expectations.

They bowed to the audience and went back to their positions. Jun Hyuk went in front of the piano, and Danny sat on a simple chair.

Maestro Carras smiled and lifted the baton high. The audience became swept in darkness within an instant. Once the baton started moving, the darkness became filled with music.



The 1st part opened with the string instruments' rough, rhythmical, and somehow sharp feeling that emphasizes the bass. Continuing on, the violin part played a faster melody. The flute's solo, string and woodwinds mixed to increase the music gradually.

The roar of the brass wind instruments was enough to shake the audience. It is only the 1st part, but a strong sound started to dominate the audience without giving them time to catch their breaths.

The trumpet and trombone joined the timpani to create an intense energy, and the

string instruments took control of the stage with a resilient rhythm.

The following melodies presented endless new themes to show that they do not follow normal sonata forms and broke all imaginations that the audience had of music.

When the 1st part ended, they could hear the audience panting from exhaustion of the changing music. Danny stood from his chair and Jun Hyuk put his hands on the piano to prepare for the 2nd part.

Maestro Carras did not consider the exhausted audience at all and brandished his baton after meeting eyes with Danny and Jun Hyuk.

Danny did not use intense force. He played with a romantic and peaceful sensation that is a little gloomy, bringing out the feeling that he was thinking of a place full of memories. It was like a breeze blowing in on a beautiful moonlit spring day.

The single flower in a battlefield that Jun Hyuk's piano had shown in the 1st rehearsal was coming through Danny's violin melody.

Dimitri Carras found new inspiration when he heard Jun Hyuk's piano, and tried to put that emotion in Danny's violin. It was also an appropriate interpretation for Danny, who is better at classic beauty than he is with something aggressive and destructive.

But, being entangled by the orchestra is a challenge that he needs to resolve, and showing sentimentality throughout the performance as young people often do is a homework he needs to complete.

Danny had not yet completely solved that challenge and homework, but it is just partial immaturity and his violin touched the people listening.

The violin's unique nuance, the melancholy that pushes and pulls the sound that goes into the heart of the person listening with direct romanticism, is Daniel Lapierre's strength. His music is full of emotional appeal that tugs at people's hearts.

The audience could not escape from the orchestra's violent oppression in the 1st part, and it became difficult for them to even breathe because of Jun Hyuk's piano as another form of pressure.

Jun Hyuk's piano encompassed the audience in the anxious atmosphere of a world that lost equilibrium. One powerful force showed a frenzied dance in an atmosphere

dominated by chaos and the unknown. The piano's force is threatening.

The music's energy was so great that it was as if the piano's hammer were not knocking on the strings, but on the bodies of the people listening. The audience was taken captive by the tingling feeling in their minds and bodies.

Jun Hyuk's piano was in rhythm, and the subtlety and energy were great. The performance unmatched in terms of strength and technique were bringing the young pianists into despair.

However, the audience was able to take a break from Danny's violin even if it were for a moment. This type of dramatic composition was showing Maestro Carras' abilities.

The violin melody full of the atmosphere of gloom, reminiscence, and moonlight was so beautiful that it encompassed even Jun Hyuk.

Jun Hyuk enjoyed the zest of a new interpretation thanks to Maestro Carras, and continued playing.

When the theme ended with the orchestra's heavy playing and solo violin in a calm and seductive atmosphere, Jun Hyuk's piano reappeared.

The melodies that seemed as if they would never end continued in turn, surpassed a simple force and made them feel a destructive atmosphere. As they passed the middle, the harp joined with the piano as a background, and that was like standing between life and death... and somewhat dreamy.

The 3rd part progressed in an even faster tempo. The 2nd part's violin melody and contrastive intensity were intense. The piano's touch, that was like a piano hammering and lively violin's double stopping (playing two notes simultaneously on a stringed instrument) showing splendor, came together to declare an equal relationship.

As they passed the 3rd part, the timpani, xylophone, and tambourine's sudden rhythm released all of the suppressed energy. As they dashed to the end, they became more violent and ended the 3rd part with a sense of urgency.

If the 2nd and 3rd parts that Jun Hyuk conducted at the Queen Elisabeth Competition were resolutions of chaos and death, the performance now is a consistent advance. Danny's violin was expressing a constant lingering attachment and regret that it kept looking back.

When the 3rd part ended, the audience breathed heavily. It showed that they had been liberated from extreme tension. But that relaxation was only for a moment, and they needed to prepare for the big wave that would come over them soon.

The 4th part started with the woodwinds and brass instruments presenting a confident and resolute atmosphere. The violin's tragic beauty flowed out in the 2nd motif along with the piano's appearance to unfold 2 melodies.

The vocal soloist presented Ode to Joy with a classic atmosphere, unlike the unconventional taste shown until now. The timpani, cello, double bass, and horn came together to create a majestic atmosphere.

Wind instruments, including the tuba, showed contrast against the vocals, and the following piano and violin melodies gave feelings of deep sorrow. A violent and ominous melody that showed exhausted and tired expressions at times.

The soprano's endless treble came together with the violin and piano to create a grotesque sound instead of the beautiful song in Beethoven's choral symphony, as if it did not exist in the first place.

The orchestra created a dark and heavy melody with the cello and contrabass playing in a bass that kept going lower to increase tension. After the brass wind instrument and timpani suddenly became more passionate, the chorus' song finally went forward wildly and spread across the theater.

The chorus went for over 10 minutes and kept singing the joy of victory as though putting a stop to a long and rough road. The piano and violin's splendid technique was at the peak, and 120 instruments and 150 voices filled the theater.

Maestro Carras' arms intersected and stopped as though they had finally come to a full stop.

A performance reaching a whopping 75 minutes ended, but it seemed like that aftertaste would last for 75 days.

The first people in the audience to shake that aftertaste and shout bravo were the maestros. With their standing ovation, the inside of the theater became full of the sounds of passionate applause and whistling.

Young musicians' honest expression made that fever greater. There was a curtain call

that seemed like it would last forever. They were showing more enthusiasm than they would at the summer festival's rock concert.

Chapter 218

Behind the stage, members of the New York Philharmonic Board of Directors could not hide their excitement and happiness while waiting for the performers. They had seen countless reporters, critics, and sponsors clap crazily once the concert was over.

They were sure that, with this kind of fever and response, the New York Times culture pages would have to be covered with today's concert. It has been a while since they have had such great success.

They had been a bit nervous when Maestro Carras first requested a special performance. The song had won in a competition and it is by a young man who has been discussed along with Beethoven, but it was true that they had first considered what critics would think.

However, today was so successful that there would not have been such a great response even if it had been the real Beethoven's performance.

On top of that, they had recorded everything, even the sound of breathing. They could expect high revenue from record sales as well. So many people visited the home page that the server went down.

The Board of Directors already decided on Jun Hyuk's choral concerto as part of next season's repertoire.

"Oh, Maestro! Bravo! It was the best."

"Jun, Danny. Our young heroes."

Jun Hyuk and Danny just smiled awkwardly at the Board of Directors' intense warm welcome.

"Maestro Carras and the orchestra performers are the true heroes."

When Danny was being humble, Maestro Carras spoke to the Board,

"Congratulate us once the evening concert is over. Jun will need to prepare for the

concert right away.”

“Oh, that’s right. Well... We’ve been a bother. We didn’t think of it because the concert was so great. Jun, oh no. Now, you need to go back to the maestro position. Ha ha.”

“Then, I’ll be going first.”

Jun Hyuk bowed his head to the Board of Directors and looked at the orchestra.

“Let’s gather in the practice room in an hour. That was a great performance, everyone. And don’t forget to eat.”

Jun Hyuk left backstage and walked to his personal waiting room. He did not know when she appeared, but Tara was following behind him like a shadow.

“Is there anything you need?”

“No. It’s okay. Tara, you rest too. No. Let’s just meet after the evening concert.”

Tara looked over Jun Hyuk’s expression and realized that he wants to be alone.

“Alright. Then, relax in the waiting room. I’ll send dinner to you. Is there anything you want to eat in particular?”

“No. Just get me anything.”

“Okay. Then, relax. I’ll tell you in an hour.”

Tara was about to turn around and spoke up cautiously,

“Jun. Was the concert not as good as you were expecting? Your expression isn’t good.”

“Huh? Oh, no. I’m satisfied. It was so good it couldn’t even be compared to rehearsals. I’m just thinking about what we just performed again. Don’t worry.”

From the way Jun Hyuk was smiling, it did not seem like he was lying.

“That’s a relief. Then, rest.”

Jun Hyuk went into the waiting room and threw his body onto the sofa. It was true

when he said that the concert was good. It may be because of the audience's heat and the theater's air that they did not have during rehearsals, but they had created a performance that was much more dynamic.

The piano, violin, and vocal ensemble that Maestro Carras had created during the performance was especially something that he had not been able to experience during rehearsals.

Jun Hyuk is admiring the skillful conducting that he had experienced while listening to countless performances. His expression does not look good because he is feeling envy for the first time.

Dimitri Carras' skill is not something to achieve by talent, but through experience. Unlike himself, who conducts through perfect calculation and change in sound, Carras' ability to move the performers' hearts during a performance is hard to copy.

A staff member knocked on the door and wheeled a service cart into the room. Jun Hyuk was not hungry yet, but he cleared his plate for the performance.



The orchestra gathered in the practice room and it showed in their eyes that they were more focused on the concert that would start soon rather than the one that ended successfully.

"I guess you might be having more thoughts because of me. Just think about it simply. Our Beethoven would not have regrets or shame. And in a bit, we will show the audience the boldest choral symphony."

The orchestra relaxed and a few people even giggled because of the conductor who laughed as he spoke.

"I lack conducting experience. Because of this, we might not be able to bring out a performance that is so perfect it is like a CD. But I can tell you one thing confidently."

The orchestra members were gaining strength from Jun Hyuk's confident voice.

"I promise that it won't fall short of on the spot live music or the rough taste of a live performance. Let's... enjoy our freedom on stage."

The orchestra encouraged Jun Hyuk with applause. They thought that today's choral symphony would show a different side of the New York Philharmonic. Even if it is not a successful concert, they are certain that no one can deny the emergence of a young Beethoven.

The orchestra awaited a new experience and walked onto the stage in turn.



The audience is full of people who have not stopped admiring the first concert, people who missed it, and critics who intend to fully compare the 2 concerts. Jun Hyuk bowed to them and turned around.

Tara was nervous because she saw that Jun Hyuk was anxious, but she stopped worrying when she saw the firmness in his back.

When the baton started to move lightly and dissonance started flowing out, the audience began to focus on the stage. The choral concerto they listened to in the afternoon concert is a song that they were listening to for the first time, but the melody coming out now is one that they are so used to.

When A and E notes came out continuously, an insecure and hazy feeling started to wrap the audience. After a mysterious and dreamy introduction with an uneasy feeling, the orchestra burst into the first motif.

The maestros, who know choral symphony precisely, were surprised when the first motif did not have the usual grand and decisive feeling.

They sat up in their chairs to listen to how he would carry on. There was no feeling of determinedness, and there was continued danger and precariousness.

The audience experienced anxiety again when the first motif ended and the second was not the simplicity they had been expecting. They could not figure out where the young conductor on the podium is taking a motif that is supposed to express a person using his own strength to enter paradise.

There was only one person in the audience who was listening comfortably. It was Maestro Carras.

He remembered Jun Hyuk saying that he would not be presenting an interpretation of choral symphony, but Beethoven's tenacity. The first part had expressed the gloom of Beethoven's childhood to show how his arrogant and crooked character would develop.

Choral symphony is a song that distorted one of the forms of conventional symphonies. The configuration is typically composed so that the 2nd part is slow and the 3rd part fast, but Beethoven put a fast beat, intense rhythm, and radical change in the 2nd part and changed it so that the 3rd part is slow.

There is the interpretation that he switched the order of the 2nd and 3rd parts in order to create a sublime effect in the 4th part by leading up with a slow 3rd.

The 2nd part began by completely flipping the 1st part's precarious tightrope walking. The strings suddenly switched the atmosphere while the timpani opened up calmly.

Jun Hyuk looked at the violin players and stabbed with the baton. The violin sounds became finely divided following Jun Hyuk's baton and started spitting out notes in a flash. The timpani repeatedly responded to the violin in octaves.

Jun Hyuk condensed his energy and opened a strong performance all at once. He expressed Beethoven's speeding toward his prime days while completely ignored building up the structure of music with elaborate detail.

This is the first time the audience has seen such a fast 2nd part. It is the fastest of the 4 parts in choral symphony, but Jun Hyuk surpassed fast to brandish the baton to the point of breathlessness. The orchestra was surprised that the speed was much faster than it had been during rehearsals, but they felt what he had said before about the rough taste of a live performance with their bodies and moved their hands holding the instruments vigorously.

Jun Hyuk's 2nd part flowed out relentlessly that it could make record as the fastest 2nd part performed in history.

The 3rd part is a beautiful tapestry created with a heavenly melody that philosopher Hopper praised as 'sublime, as if flying with wings'.

The violin's faint feeling and wind instruments' echo like the beautiful melody of a grand orchestra's banquet opening became embedded in the audience's minds with Beethoven self-admiration.

They felt the 3rd part's melody that showed them a man's instinct rather than a man's nobility, and started to see the young conductor's back and Beethoven start to overlap. That is when they started to realized, little by little, that the song to come soon is not Ode to Joy, but a celebration of success.

They went into the 4th part of a sudden presto.

The strings created a more disturbing sound and as soon as the cello and bass said something, 'Ode to Joy' came out.

It expanded gradually with the woodwinds as a start, next was the cello and bass, then all of the strings, and lastly the orchestra quarter to show an arrogant facade.

Finally, the baritone started singing "O freunde....." with a thick voice in recitativo (singing as though speaking).

120 instruments and 150 voices touched the audience's hearts and continued for 15 minutes without resting.

Jun Hyuk's music of 70 minutes ended with, "Joy, the brilliance of beautiful gods!"

After a short silence, there was a storm-like applause and the conductor put the baton down to turn around.

Jun Hyuk saw the audience cheering enthusiastically and flying handkerchiefs in the air.

It is the scene that Beethoven, who could not hear, had seen after he finished the premiere of his choral symphony and someone helped him turn around to the audience.

The handkerchiefs are a visual acclaim for Beethoven who cannot hear their cheering. Jun Hyuk was seeing for himself the highest tribute that could be paid to a performance of choral symphony.

Chapter 219

“It’s hard to know whether the young maestro is smart or was born with sense.”

“Will you go into more depth?”

One critic could not hide his excitement as he spoke into a microphone that a reporter held to his mouth.

“You saw the audience today, right? It was mostly filled with youths. These vigorous youths react with their bodies first. They are not uncomfortable with the young maestro’s interpretation that undressed Beethoven. They reacted to the dramatic and fierce melody first.”

“How about how he undressed Beethoven?”

“You didn’t feel it? Today’s choral symphony is not Ode to Joy. He showed the rude and arrogant Beethoven. We’ve gone back in time 200 years to see Beethoven for ourselves. Ha ha.”

There were a lot of different evaluations. There were people saying, ‘The most rude and arrogant of thousands of performances of choral symphony’, a style of ‘malignity’ that overburdened Beethoven, and that it showed him as a ‘rebel’ of the time.

Jun Hyuk smiled as he looked at the New York Philharmonic members who could not hide their excitement. Their expressions were a praise that touched him more than the audience’s fierce tribute had.

“Maestro. I’ve been playing the violin for 30 years, but I felt like I had gone back to my younger days. I don’t know how long it’s been since I’ve played with passion rather than emotion and my head.....”

“That passion was relayed to me. It was an incredible performance.”

Bandmaster Samuel Gilberto could not hide the flush in his cheeks and embraced Jun Hyuk warmly. While he was speaking with the orchestra including the bandmaster, the maestros encircled him.

“That performance was meant to completely undress Beethoven, right? Looks like you’ll be hearing some bitter feedback tomorrow.”

“Well, what of it? Aren’t they critics who only say negative things anyway? It was work that someone needed to go at least once. Is this one of those things that’s only possible when you’re young? Ha ha.”

A factor that is considered important when interpreting a song is the background of the song’s birth or the situation that the composer was in. The composer’s thoughts and psychological state, according to the circumstances, are bound to be firmly buried in the song.

Of Mozart specialists, there are many who perform his light works with expressions of anxiety and restlessness. Though he created a light melody for the public, they are trying to show his thoughts precisely. He always craved love and recognition, and had to go around borrowing money because of his difficult economic situation.

The foundation of today’s performance had shown, not just Beethoven’s feelings, but his inner conflicts. There will be a lot of people who are uncomfortable with the fact that Jun Hyuk has dragged the malignant Beethoven down to the position of average people.

“What does the conductor’s intent matter? You all saw how the audience reacted. We’ll know when the album comes out. I’m positive it’ll see tremendous sales. Judged on music alone, it’ll be able to show that it was the most passive aggressive rendition of choral symphony performed in the past 10 years.”

The party backstage was not long. There is still the outdoor concert in Damrosch Park. The real party will open after the performance tomorrow.



Danny’s agent shouted gleefully at the endless calls. Planners who saw today’s performances were asking to meet for all types of performances, including solo concerts and collaborations.

Stern Corporation employees kept receiving calls as well. Even though it was late, they were asking about Jun Hyuk’s future plans and showing their interest in preparing a concert.

The people gathered in Jun Hyuk's apartment were celebrating the end of a successful concert with wine.

"You... Is this why you prevented me from seeing the rehearsals? Honestly, it's not my style. I like solemn and holy symphonies."

"If Mr. Yoon had been a critic, we would have had a scathing review."

Isaac Stern laughed at Yoon Kwang Hun's sullen words.

"Of course. How should I put it... It's like he took a noble relic from the depths of a museum and decorated it in a department store window?"

"It almost sounds like a compliment?"

Amelia put her arm around Jun Hyuk's shoulder and interpreted Yoon Kwang Hun's evaluation differently.

"No no. It's not bad criticism, but it's more so not a compliment."

"Aren't you saying that it was a performance that anyone could approach, not just those who love classical music? That's a compliment."

While everyone laughed and enjoyed the aftertaste of the concert, an employee went to President Stern and whispered in his ear. His eyes widened.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. They are saying that they will send a formal offer."

"Did someone from them come to today's performance? I didn't see anyone."

"Because so many maestros attended today... They say he was secretive so no one would see. They wouldn't have wanted to get caught up in unnecessary rumors."

When President Stern's expression grew serious, everyone stopped their conversations and looked at him.

"Oh, something came up... Jun, can you come with me for a moment?"

President Stern glanced at Jun Hyuk and went up to the 2nd floor bedroom.

“It’s actually something we could announce in front of anyone, but I wanted to be sure. I want to hear your honest thoughts.”

President Stern is being conscious of Yoon Kwang Hun. He is someone who has a great influence over Jun Hyuk’s decisions. He already knows that Jun Hyuk is willing to force himself to do something if it is what Yoon Kwang Hun wants.

“What is it? It’s been a while since I’ve seen such a serious expression.”

“I just got a call that Seattle Symphony wants you.”

“What? Seattle? But, what do they want from me?”

“They want to leave Seattle Symphony to you for 2 years.”

Jun Hyuk was speechless. It is not a one-time special concert. 2 years is a short period, but his first thought was that it is a reckless decision to leave an orchestra to him when he does not even have a career to speak of.

“The music director position with Seattle Symphony is vacant right now. They’re rotating through guest conductors, hm... It could be that your character as a guest conductor is strong since they’ve set 2 years for now.”

Jun Hyuk was finally able to speak.

“But why me? I don’t have the experience... I’ve conducted twice. Isn’t that all?”

“My guess is... Since Seattle has a strong progressive tendency, they’ll think of that as nothing. They could have looked solely at ability rather than experience and achievements, and there will be something to the show business aspect of it.”

“Show?”

Jun Hyuk did not know what he meant by show business.

“Truthfully, their situation isn’t good right now... Concert and album sales are at a low. It wasn’t a bad decision for them since they are the friendliest neighborhood to Asians. From Queen Elisabeth Competition to today, you’re at the center of news.”

Seattle is where Starbucks was first created. It is where guitar hero Jimi Hendrix was born and the place alternative rock legend Nirvana's Kurt Cobain chose for his tragic death.

The exhibitions change every month at the Seattle Museum, but the Nirvana and Jimi Hendrix corners stay the same even now.

"And there's a good condition. They'll leave the repertoire entirely to you and not interfere with that. I thought that's a definite, but there's another meaning to it. It means you can put whatever songs you've made or what you're going to make from now on, on that stage."

President Stern thought that it was an incredible condition that Jun Hyuk would be able to put whatever song he wants to on stage. But, Jun Hyuk did not look happy or excited.

"Take your time to think about it since it's not urgent."

"Isaac, what do you think?"

"Me? Is my opinion necessary? It's important what you think."

"If you don't hurry up and tell me, the empty end date on our contract is going to be filled with today's date. You would have started making some money too. Ha ha."

Jun Hyuk joked as he laughed.

"Well well. You only say the scariest things. Ha ha."

President Stern laughed and became serious again.

"It's not a bad idea to go to Seattle if you think of the Seattle Symphony as an instrument that you can tune up."

"But the contract term is just 2 years?"

"The 2 years in a first contract is meaningless. It's not a term that they mean to keep no matter what?"

"What? It's not the contract term?"

“Yeah. I’m sure the 2 years doesn’t mean that they’ll say bye to you after 2 years. It’s their demand for you to bring out some kind of result within 2 years. There’ll be an extension if there are results. They’ll be saying bye if there are none.”

“So, the Seattle Symphony is assessing me.”

“Right. If the results are unbelievably great, they might try to get you to stay on for another 10 years on the next contract. If you bring end game results, it won’t be hard for them to hand over a lifetime contract.”

Results he could accomplish in 2 seasons. Breakthrough success in concert and album sales, and raising the orchestra’s level. This is what he needs to show them.

“Anyway, the important part of the contract isn’t the term but the details. Aren’t things like your salary, vacations, house, and car more important to you? I’ll take care of it.”

Making the Seattle Symphony into my own instrument.

Jun Hyuk thought about the meaning of this thoroughly. He would become the owner of an orchestra, the greatest, grandest, and diverse instrument in the world.

“An orchestra’s fame and level are almost entirely dependent on the conductor. The reason why Seattle is so criticized now is because they haven’t had a good conductor in a while and the members’ dissension is great.”

Since an orchestra changes drastically according to the standing conductor, it only takes moments to plummet if it does not meet a good owner.

“Then, does that mean I can reject if I don’t need an instrument of my own?”

President Stern’s eyes sparkled.

“Of course. To work with something that’s not even mine for 2 years? The difficult part is going through all of the hard work to make them useful.”

“I see. Then, reject it for me.”

“Really? I see you aren’t after a standing conductor position yet?”

President Stern was not surprised by Jun Hyuk’s rejection, and seemed to welcome it.

“Yes. I would rather experience orchestras right now. Oh, I guess that doesn’t go the way I want it to either.”

“Leave it to me. I’ll let you get experience until you’re bored of it. There’s going to be a line of orchestras who want to work with you from now on.”

President Stern did not want to leave Jun Hyuk tied up in one place as a conductor. He wanted to let him be free until his shining talent was known all around the world.

“And there’s one more thing I’d like to ask for.”

“Yeah, sure.”

“I won’t be conducting choral concerto from now on.”

“What? Why? Do you know how many places want the composer’s conducting?”

President Stern jumped back surprised and Jun Hyuk laughed as he spoke,

“I already conducted it with the Belgian National Orchestra and performed as a pianist. That’s enough. I’m more curious as to how other maestros express my music. I think that more, especially, after hearing Maestro Carras’ concert today.”

President Stern looked at Jun Hyuk and burst out laughing.

“Alright. I guess it won’t be bad to put your work out to the world and see how it changes either.”

President Stern stood up. He fully understood Jun Hyuk.

“Then rest. I’ll be going. It’ll be good to go to sleep early since there’s the concert tomorrow. You’ll need an acoustic check and rehearsal since it’s an outdoor performance.”

When President Stern left, everyone went to bed. The concert is not over yet. The real party will open tomorrow.

“Jun. What did you and Isaac talk about?”

Amelia asked cautiously as she dug deeper into Jun Hyuk’s embrace. She is more

curious as to why President Stern did not announce it.

“Huh? Oh, it was nothing. He said the Seattle Symphony got in contact to sign a 2-year contract with me.”

“What? Seattle? Goodness! So? Did you say okay?”

“No, I rejected it.”

Amelia was so surprised she bolted up in bed.

“Why? Isn’t it every conductor’s dream to have an orchestra of his own? Even though it’s only 2 years, you don’t know what might happen after.”

“Hm... It hasn’t been long since I started playing orchestras as an instrument. I want to get more experience. And Isaac is someone who can support me in the experiences I want. There’s still a lot of time left.”

Amelia stared at Jun Hyuk.

“What is it? You’re gaining more confidence by the day. Great. You have to have his much confidence if you’re Amelia’s boyfriend.”

Amelia laughed and laid in Jun Hyuk’s arms again.

Chapter 220

The planning team and New York Philharmonic board were in an intense meeting early in the morning. No one can step foot in Damrosch Park because it is already packed with people.

“Are you sure everyone is here because of today’s concert? There could be people taking walks in the park.”

“From what we hear, they’re all there for the concert. There’s a barrage of questions regarding tickets, too.”

Reviews on the concert that came pouring out last night made people gather to the park. Ironically, it brought in more people who were criticizing the concert than those praising it.

A performance that delved all the way into Beethoven. The criticisms that it completely ignored the sublime aspect of choral symphony had brought people out due to their curiosity.

The New York Philharmonic board laid out their opinions while fighting back the desire to laugh. They cannot lose such a great opportunity. The more people there are who watch the concert, the higher album sales are bound to be.

“What do you think about just opening it up? People who bought tickets can sit in the seats and the rest can enjoy the concert from the grass even though they won’t be able to see the stage very well.”

“Then we’ll have to increase the sound equipment. They’re almost done setting up already...”

It is an open space as it is. Opening the concert so that everyone can hear is the same thing as saying that they should increase the number of speakers that they are using.

“It’s a festival period right now. Though it might be a little tiring, what do you think of preparing it for the citizens of New York?”

“There’s no reason to worry much if it’s just a matter of increasing the number of speakers. The issue is that it’s difficult to prepare it so that the sound is relayed properly. Don’t you think poor sound quality could become a nuisance to the maestro?”

“We will speak to the maestro about that. We’ll have to tell him that the sound quality going outside will be a little low and ask for his understanding.”

If a crowd surges to an outdoor concert, it is difficult to expect great sound. To compare with a theater, it is the difference between the high quality sound of a CD and an MP3 file.

Every June in Austria, the Vienna Philharmonic holds its Midsummer Night Concert on an outdoor stage by the Schloss Schonbrunn Neptune fountain. The crowd that comes to see this easily runs over 100,000 people. The admission is free.

London’s BBC PROMS is the same. The summer festival performances are at the Royal Albert Hall, Royal Music Academy, and Cadogan Hall under a banner for popularization of classical music. The closing performance on PROMS’ last day at Hyde Park in particular, is presented to hundreds of thousands of people.

Because these outdoor concerts happen periodically, the fitting sound systems are planned and prepared in advance. Even still, it is difficult to expect great sound quality anywhere that is not close to the stage. With an unexpected situation like today, they need to give up on perfect sound.

The only person who can decide on giving up on sound is the maestro. There is no conductor who welcomes the fact that his music will be ruined by the sound system.



“Jun, what do you think?”

“Isn’t it better for more people to be able to hear music? We need to give up on sound quality to a certain point since it is an outdoor concert.”

“Your thoughts are exactly the same as mine.”

Maestro Carras and Jun Hyuk’s agreeing opinion put the concert planners at ease.

They can give up on sound quality and gear the direction toward doing a service for the citizens of New York.

Once this news was out, more people swarmed to Damrosch Park.

“Jun. Are you going to put some change into today’s performance too?”

“What? That’s impossible. Even changing the tempo is scary. I’m thinking of performing like we did yesterday.”

Jun Hyuk waved his hand as Dimitri Carras laughed softly.

“No. I’m not talking about your conducting but your piano. Can I expect a different piano from that of yesterday?”

“It’s the same for that as well. You can enjoy a new piano with a new pianist. I’ll perform in the same way.”

“New?”

Maestro Carras’ face darkened because he knew what it meant.

“Then you’re saying you won’t continue working with the New York Philharmonic? I was thinking of performing with you again in the fall repertoire.”

“Aren’t there a lot of pianists who would come in a heartbeat if you call? Even New Yorkers will get tired of it if it’s constantly the same performance.”

“There’s no reason to get tired of it if it’s someone like you with a unique sound. It’s hard to find something as fun as performing with you... This is upsetting.”

“You need to find fun in performing a new song with me.”

“Oh, I see that confidence? You must tell me if you write a new song. You need to premiere it with our New York Philharmonic. Promise?”

Carras thought that they would be able to come across a new work by fall at the latest since Jun Hyuk is always writing new music. His face quickly brightened as he thought of experiencing fresh surprise again.

“Oh right. Isaac told me that you turned the Seattle Symphony down?”

“Yes. I think I’m still lacking.”

“Really? I heard differently. I heard you said it needs to be better than Seattle.”

“Huh? Are you saying that Isaac said that to you?”

“Ha ha. I’m joking.”

Carras laughed at Jun Hyuk’s surprise and then became serious again. He wanted Jun Hyuk to take his next words seriously.

“I’m thinking of recommending you as my successor when I retire from the New York Philharmonic, so don’t turn it down then.”

“Would the New York Philharmonic ever let go of you?”

“I’m not Karajan, so a lifetime contract isn’t possible. It’ll change in 5 years if it’s long-term and 3 if it’s short. They used an old man like me for so long, so they’ll definitely want a young conductor as my successor... I’m pretty sure if it’s you, the board would unanimously agree. The orchestra is in love with you too, so there’s no issue there.”

Rather than being surprised by Dimitri Carras’ words, Jun Hyuk first wondered if President Stern had not pushed for Seattle yesterday because of this.

He said 5 years at most. If he is certain for Carras’ successor, there is no reason to spend 2 years with Seattle. The New York Philharmonic’s status has fallen a bit, but it is still the orchestra representing America. Jun Hyuk’s heart began to beat.

“Thank you for your kind words.”

“It’s not a joke. If you just gain some more experience from now on – actually the question is whether or not you even need that – no one doubts that you’ll become the greatest conductor in the world. It’s not just me. I’m sure all maestros are thinking the same thing.”

His comfortable mindset flowed naturally into his performance. Music of a drowsy weekend afternoon permeated the park through the piano, violin, and orchestra.

Maestro Carras' baton moved in a relaxed manner. Right now, the New York Philharmonic's music is not an art that needs to be focused on but background music for the park. It is a performance that shows another role of music.

Jun Hyuk's performance at 8 did not have less of an audience. The people actually laid back and relaxed as they breathed in the fresh summer air.

Jun Hyuk said that he would conduct in the same way he did yesterday, but he conducted in a slightly slower tempo so as not to break the tranquil atmosphere.

It may be difficult to notice this minute difference in tempo, but he conducted so that the performers fully knew his intention.

The orchestra also performed in a relaxed state, and this comfortable choral symphony spread out into the night sky above Damrosch Park.



"You always show us something new. You changed the vibe completely with such a small change in tempo."

"I was surprised again. He said that there wouldn't be a surprise show. That he would give the same performance he did yesterday. But... Ha ha."

After the concert, everyone related to the production celebrated the end of all of the performances in a Lincoln Center hall reserved for them.

"Oh, that wasn't planned. Today's performance was totally the orchestra's stage. I was just faithful to my role in keeping the tempo. We just delivered the orchestra's feeling of being encompassed by the park's easy going atmosphere."

"Are you saying that you're already so connected with the orchestra that you don't even need words? That's even scarier."

Realizing the conductor's intent just by looking at his eyes, and recognizing the orchestra's state from listening to the first note – it is like the relationship of an old married couple. It is what every conductor wants. That is why there are lifetime conductors.

“That’s not just me. Everyone would have had the same feeling. Everyone really melted into the comfortable atmosphere of the park today.”

The difference between the theater and park is not the sound, but the attitude toward the music. It is the difference between appreciating the music and feeling it like a wind that is momentarily warding off the summer heat.

“Since the concert is over now, what are your plans going forward?”

The New York Philharmonic asked as they have a lot of interest in Jun Hyuk’s happiness.

“Well. I don’t really have any special plans made yet.”

“I know those plans well.”

President Stern appeared out of nowhere, put his arms around Jun Hyuk’s shoulders, and waved to everyone.

“There are a lot of places who want our friend. But he’s going to just rest for at least a month.”

“Is that so? You’ll just be resting for a month?”

Jun Hyuk laughed as well and put his arm around Stern’s shoulders.

“Of course. It’s summer vacation when everyone is taking a break. If you can, go to my villa in Switzerland and rest. And it’d be fine for everyone to go. Mr. Yoon, Amelia, Danny.”

“Mr. Stern. Thank you, but I need to go to Philadelphia tomorrow. I have a concert scheduled.”

Danny had been listening to the maestros quietly when he spoke with a flushed face.

“It was decided in the morning. My agent told me. A solo concert for 2 days. And a concert with the Philadelphia Philharmonic. We’re planning on performing in September.”

“Oh, congratulations. So what about the repertoire?”

“Thank you, Mr. Yoon. It’s Paganini and Brahms.”

He had been able to be relaxed and give a steady performance today because of the concert atmosphere, but also because he received the request from the Philadelphia Philharmonic.

“Then, we should save the young people, shouldn’t we? They’re going to be smothered if they keep hanging out with old people like us.”

President Stern spoke to Jun Hyuk and Danny.

“Jun, Danny. We’ll let you go, so get going. It’s late. Go before Amelia tears me apart. I’ll go to the apartment tomorrow, so let’s go into the details then.”

Jun Hyuk and Danny said their goodbyes to the people at the party and left. They rushed to the apartment to spend some time to themselves. When they left the party, they saw a familiar face waiting for them outside.

“Collin!”

Chapter 221

“This kid! What is this? When did you get here?”

Danny ran over right away and hugged Colin. This is also Jun Hyuk’s first time seeing him after they separated in LA, and took the hand Colin held out to him.

“Jun, the show was good. Your talent really isn’t rusty at all. No, I think it shines even more.”

“Don’t talk nonsense. Why are you here all of a sudden?”

“What do you mean why? I came to see the show. Neither of you pick up your phones, so I was wandering for a while.”

“Oh, sorry. I left mine with my manager...”

Danny finally remembered that he doesn’t have his phone on him. He was completely forgetting about where his agent was because he was surrounded by maestros. “Let’s not hang around here. We should go back home first.” Jun Hyuk took Colin’s arm and got in the waiting limousine.



“Colin! Goodness. What is a rock star doing here?”

“I can’t miss Jun’s U.S. debut stage. I needed to come yesterday, but I can’t stop time.” Amelia saw Colin come through the door and also expressed her delight.

“Clayton’s top beauty is still the same.”

Jun Hyuk saw Yoon Kwang Hun go to Colin, who he was meeting for the first time, and introduced him.

“I told you before that there’s a cellist who’s incredible on the bass, right? This is him.”

“Ohh. So this is the friend who rejected becoming Yo-Yo Ma and chose Curt Kobain’s

path. It's a pleasure."

"It's nice to meet you. I'm Colin Sabotos. Yo-Yo Ma and Curt Kobain are both remote."

Colin laughed bitterly and his old friends were busy asking how he has been doing recently.

Colin released his first album and started from the bottom, sweeping through California's clubs with an arrangement by LA Sound. It was the start of a rigorous schedule.

"We released the album thanks to Jun and started performing in clubs. I would perform at 3 or 4 clubs a night, be reduced to rags, and go back to the apartment to pass out." Colin shook his head. He was recalling memories of suffering.

"The drunk jerks disturb the shows... Ugh, don't even mention it. I don't even want to think about it twice."

"I guess you've gotten out of the clubs since you're saying you don't want to think about it again?"

When Yoon Kwang Hun spoke, Colin's face brightened with a smile.

"Yes. We're fairly well known in the west now. Since we've made our band known to a certain point, we hold joint and solo concerts at times now. Of course we can't do tours across the country yet....."

"But, it doesn't look good from your expression."

Amelia looked over Colin's face and spoke cautiously. It could be that he is exhausted because of a long flight or a concert, but this is not the face of a musician who was working to gain popularity.

His dark shaded face shows that he is without a doubt worried about something.

"We went east through LA, San Diego, and San Francisco while preparing our 2nd album. We presented new songs occasionally and reactions weren't bad. But..." Colin faltered suddenly and his face quickly turned red.

"Damn it. The drummer left."

“What? He left? How could that happen?”

“Why after suffering through everything? I thought you guys were doing well.”

Danny and Amelia shouted at the same time. A drummer who suddenly quits a band that is growing well. It is something that they cannot understand.

“He said my music sucks. It’s just really flashy and there’s too much that’s unnecessary.”

“I feel like that’s true. Isn’t it?”

Jun Hyuk had been listening quietly when he spoke up for the first time. Colin’s face grew even redder.

“Yeah. I tried to be cool and it was really flashy. That’s my music. But I can’t agree that the flashiness and splendor are useless. Anyway, the drummer left saying that he wants to do alternative music.”

70s rock music pioneered various genres like hard rock heavy metal, blues rock, southern rock, and progressive rock, and emphasized performances with depth. 80s rock was the golden age for the guitar as a phallic symbol and a macho image of wearing leather jackets.

But since the 90s, rock music has been focusing on delivering messages. Concise guitar riffs, drums that are not flashy, and meaningful lyrics are the characteristics. Like the shabby jeans and t-shirts that band members wore on stage, alternative music expressed their rejection of existing musicians’ ideas of money, love, and pleasure.

Colin wants music with harmonious melodies of the guitar, bass, and drums with each part giving an admirable performance, rather than the delivery of messages in alternative rock. They just have not been able to show that admirable performance yet because they have not found a keyboardist to join them.

He had tried to get Jun Hyuk to go into pop music with them in the first place because he needed Jun Hyuk’s piano skills.

“I want to show the kind of music I want to pursue to the public. I’ll turn down the role of playing messenger regarding the circumstances that today’s youth have been placed in and their worries.”

Colin calmed down again and quietly explained his thoughts.

“If you wanted to do music that people like and not music that I want to do, you didn’t need to give up the cello. You can play the Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms that people like.”

“But don’t you think you should listen to your members’ opinions and work together?”

Band members are equal relations regarding music. If there are colliding opinions, they need to reach a compromise. Though the leader’s views are most important, the leader needs to persuade the others at the least. However, Colin’s response was like that of a dictator’s. “No. I’m doing my music. All I need is a guitarist and drummer who play the music I make. If the guitarist and drummer want to do their own music, I’ll have to find other people.”

In some way, Colin is like an orchestra conductor and not a band leader. He seems to be thinking of band members as instruments that implement his music.

“So did you find a drummer who’s to your liking?”

Danny pushed a beer towards Colin with a nervous look. Colin took a big gulp.

“It’s not easy. And I can tell that the guitarist is conflicted because the drummer position is vacant. It’s a real headache.”

When the atmosphere became heavy in the living room, Colin hastily waved his hand.

“Sorry. I really didn’t come here to talk about stuff like this. I came because I didn’t want to miss out on that shining moment when Jun conducts the New York Philharmonic.”

Jun Hyuk completed a great performance tonight. It is fitting to drink and celebrate.

“Colin. Can we listen to your flashy and cool music?”

“Excuse me? Oh, no. It’s too much to do now. How could I when there are so many people with sharp ears here? I’m scared when it’s obvious that all kinds of criticism will come raining down on me. Ha ha.”

Colin jumped in surprise at Yoon Kwang Hun’s sudden suggestion, but everyone else

clapped and welcomed it.

“What of it? Honestly, I’ve never heard your music.”

Amelia stared at Colin, and Jun Hyuk added in,

“We won’t tell you to fix it, so let’s hear it. Don’t we need to see if you’ve been playing around until now or if you’ve gotten better?”

When Colin sighed and took out his phone, Jun Hyuk turned on the audio system and connected it through bluetooth.

Yoon Kwang Hun’s eyes were brightest as Colin’s new song filled the living room. This alone shows what kind of music Colin is pursuing.

“This is really my style. It’s progressive rock. And the length of the song is no joke. Jun, how long is it?”

“7 minutes 46 seconds.”

Jun Hyuk said the time as soon as Yoon Kwang Hun looked at him.

“Yeah. There’s barely any lyrics... It could even be seen as an instrumental.”

“Yes. This is my favorite song. I was going to make it a complete instrumental, but I put in a little for vocals. Like seasoning.”

“You mixed in Brahms. Can’t hide that you come from classical music. The configuration is charming too.”

Danny gave him a thumbs up. Colin only looked at Jun Hyuk, who was not saying anything. He was waiting for the most precise evaluation of whether he has grown, stayed the same, or worst case scenario, gone backwards.

“It’s good that the drummer left. Isn’t he just a hindrance to your music? I don’t think he left because of a difference in music styles, but because he’s lacking the skill.”

Everyone was surprised by Jun Hyuk’s comments and their eyes grew wide, but Colin was the only person to laugh bitterly.

“Well... that’s a part of it. I did push a bit. We did over 100 takes for just the drums while recording this song. We picked the best of those for this recording.”

“A drummer who can handle a song like this will hear that he’s talented everywhere he goes... I’m sure it isn’t easy to find such a talent. But to tell a drummer like that to shut up and only play the kind of music that you want? It’s one issue after the other.” Yoon Kwang Hun nodded at Jun Hyuk’s words.

“I’ll bet. People in their twenties these days prefer consistency to outstanding performances. It’s hard to find a talented drummer who can perform a colorful drum solo for more than 10 minutes.”

Jun Hyuk looked at Colin and tilted his head. Colin’s music is similar to 70s progressive rock. The difference is that he shows more refinement in terms of technicality, but that derives more from the system than from music.

“But can you release an album with a progressive song like this? I don’t think a record label would delve into such an adventure, unless it’s an independent label.”

“That’s why I clash a lot with LA Sound. Eli and Alexander okayed the 1st album right away because you got rid of the progressive color with your arrangement. But now... whew.”

Colin said that it is a clash, but he is telling them that it is not so with his long sigh. They will be completely rejecting the idea of releasing his album.

“I was foolish when we were releasing the 1st album. I asked you for help because I wanted to succeed quickly and had a lot of expectations... And thanks to that, we got all the way here. I’ve never forgotten how grateful I am to you. But I really want to fill the album this time around with my own music.”

Yoon Kwang Hun thought it admirable when he saw Colin’s determination and thought about the fact that he is still in his early twenties.

“So Colin, you want to win and succeed with your music more than you want to continue your success now?”

“Yes, Mr. Yoon.”

“That’s a good attitude to have. You need to do your own music if you’re a musician.”

Yoon Kwang Hun spoke and quickly shut his mouth. Right now, the living room is full of professional musicians. He is overreaching if he keeps talking as an amateur, and it will become an unnecessary sermon.

Yoon Kwang Hun's sheepishness did not show because of Danny. Danny spoke sadly,

"Why don't you try a public audition? Didn't you say that your band is pretty popular in the west? You'll get a lot of applicants."

"We did. LA Sound did a public recruitment, but I didn't want a single person."

"Then are you going to search through New York clubs?"

"No, I need to go back tomorrow to keep going with my shows. I need to go to San Diego."

Everyone's eyes widened at mention of a show.

"How do you perform without a drummer?"

"We're scraping by with a session man. It's okay because we mainly perform songs from the 1st album."

Colin barely smiled and bolted up from the sofa.

"Alright. Let's stop talking about me and do what we really need to do tonight. Jun, you remember back when we were in a quintet and drank at a strip bar until we passed out, right? We need to get drunk like that tonight, no?"

Jun Hyuk had not been drinking, but almost passed out. Yoon Kwang Hun and Amelia's scary glares came at him like arrows.



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